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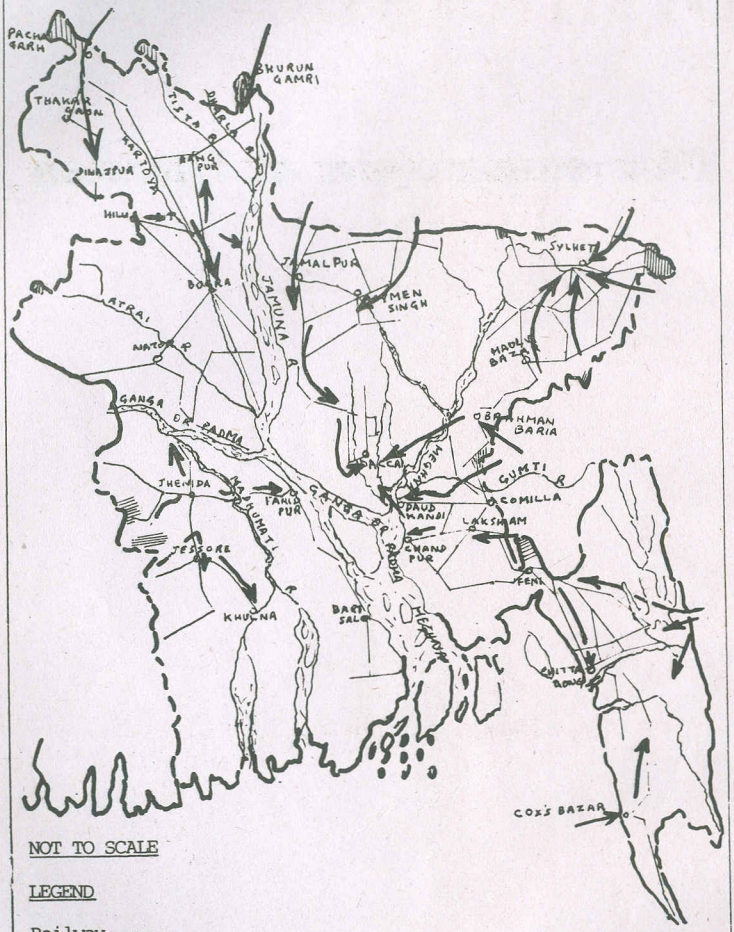
Dismemberment of Pakistan

1971 Indo-Pak War

Brig. Jagdev Singh, AVSM

MAP 1: BANGLA DESH



NOT TO SCALE

LEGEND

Railway
Road
River
Course followed by Indian advancing troops
Area taken in preliminary operations

PB-00000092

Dismemberment of Pakistan

1971 Indo–Pak War

Brigadier Jagdev Singh, AVSM

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Author's note

Dismemberment of Pakistan took place on 16 December 1971 when the Federal Government at Rawalpindi permitted Lieutenant General A.A.K. Niazi, the commander of their forces in East Pakistan, to lay down arms before the Indian military forces and accept the latter's demand for unconditional surrender. Since then dismemberment has become a subject of topical interest and importance in South Asia. Pakistan has adopted the path of revenge. They have not only talked of undoing the dismemberment (at present the idea seems to be dead) but have made positive attempts to inflict a dismemberment process upon India. In this they have the tacit support of diehard Western and Middle Eastern elements. This process will go on for some time, if not forever.

The main purpose of the book is to record an accurate enough account of how the 1971 dismemberment took place, so that the reader may understand better the events currently taking place in India, particularly along the northwestern borders and the states located behind these borders. He will also get an idea of the dynamics of the forces pitched against the security of the country.

During 1970 and 1971 cataclysmic events were taking place in East Bengal and it was common knowledge that relations between the Punjabis, who were the virtual rulers of Pakistan, and the Bengalis, whose land was being treated as a colony by the west wing rulers, had soured to an extent where rapprochement of any kind had become out of the question. Yet when the chips were down, India was caught almost on the wrong foot. India had the capability to set right the situation which had arisen out of the migration of millions of refugees, mostly Hindus, into her territory, in April or May 1971. But she appeared to have prevaricated, perhaps because militarily and politically she was not ready to get directly involved in the

affray. To recreate that opportunity she had to wait till December 1971, sign a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Russians and counter the Western pressure against open hostilities through a massive diplomatic campaign which saw even the Prime Minister visiting the pressure-bearing Western European countries and the USA.

Militarily, in the Eastern Sector, India fought a good war. The campaign brings out the importance of mobility which included sound engineering support in getting the army over the obstacles which were numerous in the riverine terrain. It also brings out the importance of improvisation and logistics. The speed with which the Indian army achieved the total surrender of the Pakistan military forces was essentially made possible by their overwhelming military superiority, and the total alienation of the Bengalis against the Pakistani army. Besides, the civil population rendered whole-hearted moral and logistical support to the advancing Indians. Additionally, India had the advantage of the world opinion which was against the Pakistanis for the atrocities committed by them against their own nationals. Otherwise, it seems, India had delayed the action long enough to get President Nixon to tilt effectively against her and order the move of the Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal, possibly with a view to causing an intervention in the progress of operations. Apart from considerations of world diplomacy that might have dissuaded the White House from taking any precipitate action, the one prominent discouraging factor that Nixon just could not have ignored, was the American public opinion which was favourably disposed towards the Bengalis.

The Indians had planned their military operation well, but the planning, it seems, had been restricted to reaching the line of the rivers. The operation to capture the inner triangle of Dacca appears to have been conducted, essentially, by improvisation. The reader will appreciate how unsatisfactory the situation would have been had the inner triangle been left out and not taken.

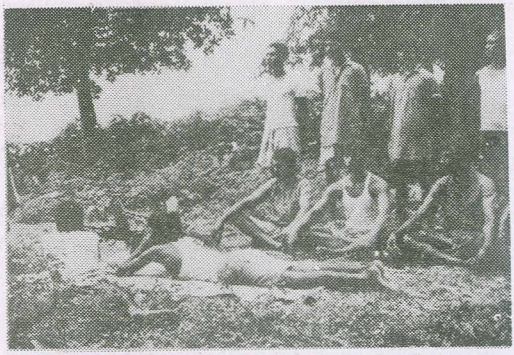
The book gives the details of the process of dismemberment. The main contributory factors were an unjust government running the affairs at the top

essentially for the benefit of a certain section of the people, the complete disenchantment of the Bengalis with this government, and the peculiar location of East Bengal in relation to West Pakistan. It is important to know the events of 1970-71 and learn from them, for there are forces at work, trying assiduously for dismemberment in our country.

The book is based on events as I saw them. There can be minor inaccuracies, but that does not in any way interfere with the main purpose of the book, which is to tell the reader what caused the dismemberment, and how we got involved with that, and what type and quality of performance we put up, particularly militarily. In a situation of this nature the military has the last word and, therefore, performance in this sphere has been covered in greater detail.

Most of the photographs given here were taken by me before, during and after the operations. The maps are not to scale and describe locations with a degree of approximation, but are based on the Survey of India maps.

Jagdev Singh

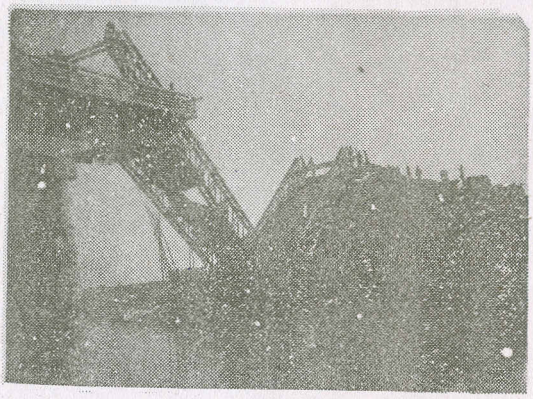


Bengalis being trained to fight

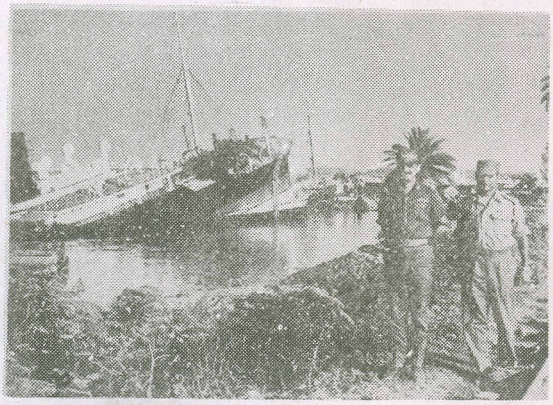
Indian Army entering Dacca

Niazi captured! GOC 4 Corps in the foreground

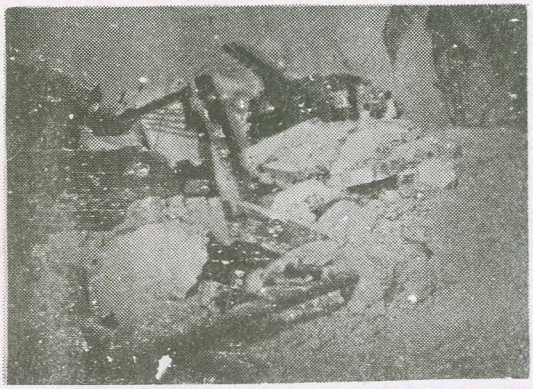
GOC 4 Corps addressing Pakistani officers and men before the surrender in Dacca



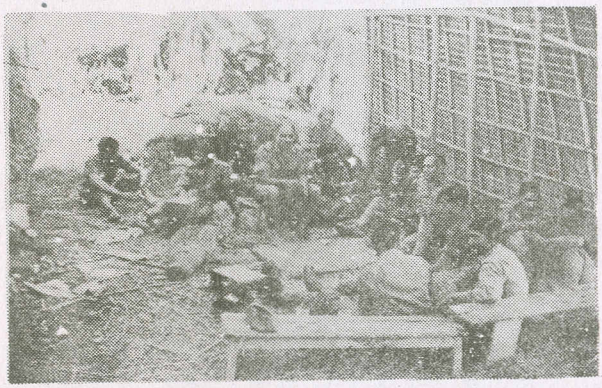
A demolished bridge



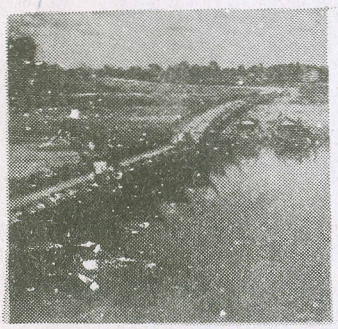
Chittagong
A half-sunk Pakistani ship and the author (left)



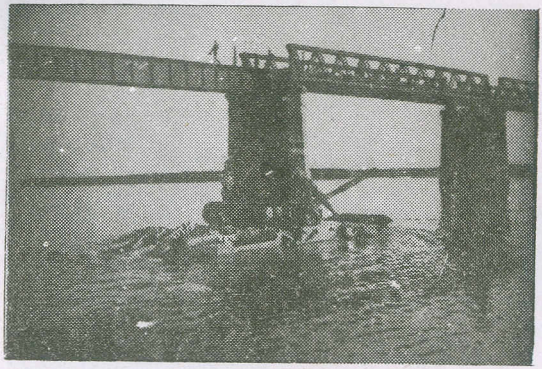
Effective bombardment of naval guns deployed along the coast at Chittagong



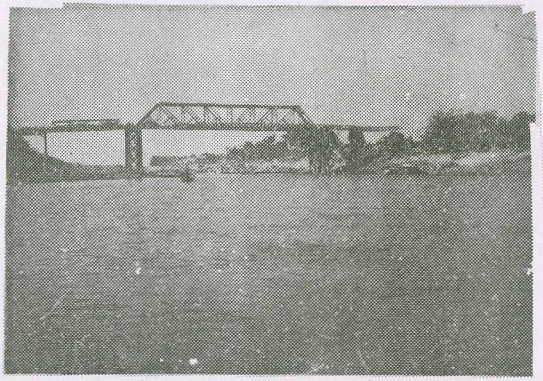
Engineers' accommodation with bamboo and thatch



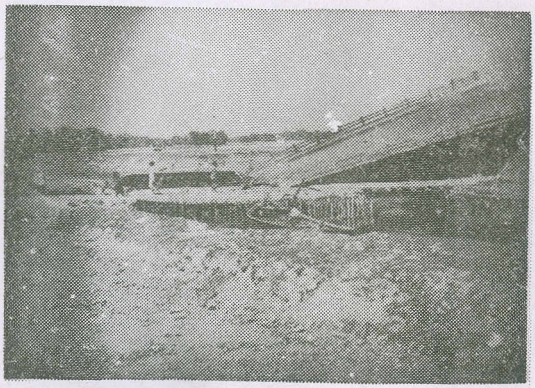
Bridge with country boats at Sonamura



Our tank crossing Titas River after the Akhaura battle



Bridge over the Surma at Sylhet. The span destroyed by Pakistan and the one that was put in its place by the Indians



Bridge destroyed and our detour alongside

PART I

1. The infrastructure

I left Tezpur (Assam) for Agartala (Tripura) early on 1 September 1971. It was a very wet day. I had to catch the flight at Gauhati, approximately 120 miles away.

Our Fokker flew over Silchar. River Barak was in high floods, and the area, as far as one could see, was mostly under water. We touched down at Agartala around 12.30 at midday. I stayed at the Circuit House where messing arrangements had been made.

The officers commanding the three Corps engineer regiments, and other Corps engineer units had already arrived at Agartala, and I met them all in the afternoon. It was not much of a business meeting. I had joined the 4 Corps Headquarters as Chief Engineer, at Tezpur, only a week earlier. My predecessor had told me all he knew of the new role of the Corps, but that was not very much. The General Staff Branch, in order to keep a tight hold on security, were not talking very much either. So we said hullo and had tea, and later drove over to Teliamura, a small town about 24 kilometres east of Agartala where it was proposed to put up the Corps Maintenance Area and the Corps Headquarters.

The low hills, around 300 feet above the mean sea level, where the Maintenance Area was being sited, were covered with thick foliage and trees. The ground was soft and spongy. A brick-lined road was being constructed by the troops of an engineer regiment, and there were any number of civilian trucks loaded with bricks, or carrying crates of ammunition, stuck in the muddy approaches around. It appeared that the things had been moved down in a hurry and the units at the receiving end were not quite ready to receive them. There was confusion. Security was particularly weak.

4 Dismemberment of Pakistan

The first task of the Corps engineers was to develop the infrastructure for launching a major offensive from Tripura into East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh). The operation was to be launched by 4 Corps with three mountain divisions and appropriate supporting arms and services. Resources for this were to move from Assam and areas further west, and from Nagaland. 57 Mountain Division was already in Tripura, and the positioning of the remaining force involved a movement of almost 100,000 troops, around 30,000 tons of stores, 3000-5000 vehicles, tanks, specialist vehicles, earth movers and the like. Most of the men and materials moved by rail, upto Dharmanagar, and thereafter by road. The rail track was broad gauge upto Bongaigaon, and metre gauge thereafter, involving transhipment. The road from Gauhati was narrow, winding through the hills in Meghalaya, and then descending into the plains around Silchar. The incessant rain made movement difficult and taxing.

All movement beyond Dharmanagar railhead was by road, a distance of about 200 kilometres upto Agartala. It was a one-way, narrow, asphalted road that every now and then ran through villages, clumps of trees, thick undergrowth, low ranges of hills running north-south, over numerous streams and water courses with weak bridges. The road had to be broadened over selected stretches, the undergrowth cleared for better visibility, bridges strengthened, curves eased to enable heavy vehicles to negotiate them. A task force of the Border Roads Organisation was allotted this job. Most of the other roads were unmetalled and movement over them was slow.

The plan visualised an attack by two divisions astride the river Gumti, one in the north and the other to the south of it, and a third division going for Sylhet from the Dharmanagar railhead. Roads were required to the bases of these divisions and thence to their objectives in East Pakistan. The Gumti was about 300 feet wide, muddy, and flowed sluggishly. Since the weight of the Corps offensive was astride this river, it had to be bridged at a number of places. But we did not have the bridging equipment. At least one of the bridges had to be strong enough for medium guns and light armour. For the construction of almost 400 kilometres of road, heavy earth-moving equipment had to be dismantled and moved down by the engineer units by road or

rail, from Gauhati/Tezpur to Dharmanagar, and thence by road to the forward locations, and then reassembled at site.

Engineering equipment was also lacking for the construction of bridges and culverts. Besides, there was need to construct scores of helipads, improve the Agartala runway to make it suitable for fighter aircraft, construct advance landing grounds for lighter planes, build accommodation for thousands upon thousands of tons of stores, workshops, hospitals and nearly 100,000 men, dig tube-wells to provide assured supply of potable water; in spite of heavy rain the sub-soil level of potable water was quite low, though on the banks of rivers and streams, water was available at reasonable depths - but it was not always potable. To accomplish all this in a mere two months or so was indeed a gigantic task. By the middle of November 1971 4 Corps had to be ready to launch the offensive.

I met the General Officer Commanding 4 Corps during the afternoon of 2 September at the Raj Bhawan where he was staying as the guest of the Lieutenant Governor, and we generally discussed the engineering problems. He wanted certain tasks speeded up. The following day I was off on reconnaissance of the international border south of Agartala, all the way down to Rajnagar, via Udaipur on Gumti river, and Belonia.

The Melaghar camp

On the way we stopped at the Mukti Bahini camp at Melaghar. Its commandant, Major Khalid Musharaff of 4 East Bengal Rifles - he got a head injury during the operations and was killed during the power struggle in the post-Mujib era; Ziaur Rahman secured the top - was an ebullient young man, quite tall, and had a dark Bengali complexion, was thinly built, and was around 30 years of age. He wore an olive green shirt, loose khaki trousers, Hawaii chappals, and no headgear. He had no formal office as such and appeared to be commanding the whole operation squatting on his bed in his tent. He was highly motivated and full of confidence. He was simply charged with hatred for the Pakistani Punjabis, who he said tortured the Bengalis and killed them and raped their women.

He explained how the Bengali movement was organized against the Punjabis. They had a wing comprising unarmed personnel who had to infiltrate and carry on intensive propaganda, motivate the Bengali population and mobilise them against the Punjabis. The people were told not to cooperate with the military dictatorship although they were not to do anything which might harm the interests of the general public. They were to socially isolate the oppressors, boycott them at every stage, which meant no one would pull them in rickshaws, take them in buses, accept them in trains or steamers or allow them in cinema halls.

What about those who did not cooperate with the movement, or did not do so with sufficient conviction?

The officer was silent for a while. Then he introduced us to his deputy, a short, thin, young Air Force sergeant who carried a sten carbine slung on his shoulder with his finger on the trigger guard as if he faced an imminent danger of being attacked. He clicked his heels when introduced and answered the queries standing fairly stiff. While the officer smiled most of the time, the sergeant seemed serious. His wife and three children lived in one of the cantonments under the control of the Punjabis, he told us. Were they well? A sad smile came on his face. He said he was in touch with his people, clandestinely. Mukti Bahini brought him regular news. He took me around the camp. It had a few tents, and there were a lot of shelters improvised out of bamboo thatch, barely high enough to accommodate a standing person. There were only a few men in the camp, the majority of them being out on missions. A few men were being trained in the arming and disarming of mines and explosives. The attitude of the men was totally casual.

Back at his camp, the Major offered us tea. At one stage he put on a serious look, and in a soft undertone said: 'The Sergeant's family lives in the house of a Punjabi officer! His own family he has sent to Punjab! And sleeps with the Sergeant's wife! Our man says she is happy. He looks after her, and the children!'

He sounded bitter. "I suppose she has no option. She can't come here and join her husband! We are here today. God knows where we shall be tomorrow."

Then he was smiling again, back to his ebullient self and took me around to show his prisoners. Huddled in a tent, under the watchful eyes of two men armed with sten carbines, wearing trousers, banyans and no shoes or headgear, sat ten-odd persons, all Biharis. One of them was 55 or 60, sporting a grey, flowing beard and the typical mullah-type moustache, while another was young, maybe 15 or 16. But the majority of them were between 30 and 40, their faces drawn, gaunt, sallow, so that their eyes looked big and haunting, their body frames thin, some even emaciated.

The officer said he was going to shoot the whole lot. He pointed to two amongst them who, he said, had planted mines on a track where a Bahini truck had got blown up and some of its occupants had got killed. Another few, which included the 16-year-old boy, he accused of killing the Hindu Bengalis and molesting their women while they were escaping to the Tripura border from the Noakhali area. He said he was a proud Muslim, but he was also a very proud Bengali and would not have a Bihari or Punjabi or anyone, kill Bengalis or rape or otherwise assault their women. He said communal trouble against the Hindus had been fomented by the Punjabis, with the active cooperation of Biharis. Otherwise, the Bengali Muslims did not want their Hindu brethren to leave the country. He said he would have killed the prisoners the previous day but their graves were not ready.

Who prepared their graves?

They themselves, who else? The fellows had been doing so for the last couple of days, but so enfeebled and, consequently, slow were they that not much had been achieved. They had just had their lunch and were to again get on with the digging.

One of the prisoners was talking incessantly, even incoherently, about his family - parents, wife, children - about his being innocent, hurling abuses - I could not make out at whom - frothing from the mouth, talking, talking! The 16-year-old just looked on, his dark, big eyes blinking in fear, his face taut, drawn: a total image of horror at its worst!

We came back to the officer's tent, and he, once again, was talking about the Mukti Bahini. As for my question about those who did not sufficiently non-cooperate with the Government, he said the Bahini did not appreciate that and conveyed its disapproval. But, he said, the Bahini did understand that sometimes people could not non-cooperate under certain compulsions.

Then there was the military wing, he explained. It was organised like the army, mostly on infantry company basis, and these companies, equipped with normal infantry weapons, like machine guns and mortars, could fight even pitched battles, or otherwise, along with guerilla elements, harass the enemy and make his living conditions difficult. When fighting in organised units and sub-units, the force was called Mukti Fauj, but when they operated as saboteurs the name given to them was that of freedom fighters.

And finally there were the regular units of East Pakistan Rifles and East Bengal Rifles, which had revolted and were available for operations against the Punjabis. These units had all the battalion-level weapons and were fairly well-rehearsed and trained for battalion-level engagements.

He told us how the Mukti Fauj was trained. The rank and file generally came from young men of towns and villages. There were a number of boys from schools and colleges and they picked up the techniques of war including those of sabotage, much faster and more easily as compared to their brothers not associated with educational institutions. They, thus, were the stock from where most of the leadership got picked up.

"We give them practice in shooting live targets too", the officer said and laughed, a full-throated, resonant laughter. To a question he said the prisoners dug their graves to avoid a death of pain and torture. To another question he said he was confident there would be Bangla Desh. How could that be avoided? How could the Punjabi rule in East Bengal when no one wanted him there? Was he confident of success even if there was no support from India? Oh, he was! It might take a bit longer, but Bangla Desh would be there, Insha Allah!

The engineer commanding officer accompanying me told me his men were imparting training in the handling of mines and explosives at these camps. The camps were located in Indian territory, virtually all around East Pakistan, barely a few kilometres from the international border. All personnel of Mukti Bahini, whether propagandists or of Mukti Fauj or the saboteur class, were free to come to any camp anywhere, although, generally, specified groups had been allotted specified sectors and camps. Sector headquarters were generally commanded by an Indian Brigadier with skeleton Indian staff; the bulk of the workforce at the sector headquarters were Bengalis of East Pakistan.

From what the officer said I got the impression that the organisation was sound. If the Bengalis hated the Punjabis as much as he said they did, and if they were prepared to suffer through the struggle, and possessed the necessary stamina, the organisation would act like the vermin, debilitating and finally eating up the structure of the Government. But hatred alone cannot bring down an enemy. It has to be backed by moral and physical strength.

The Gumti river

We left the place after we gave our good wishes to the officer, his sergeant second-in-command, and members of his staff, and by late afternoon were at Udaipur, on the bank of River Gumti. It is a sluggish river, flowing through earth banks. It was muddy, and on account of incessant rain, fairly swollen, flowing from bank to bank, with an average water span of about 300 feet. This Watery obstacle was a major worry in the initial stages, for it flowed almost in the centre of the offensive thrust proposed to be launched eastwards from areas around Agartala and to the south of it, and, therefore, was required to be crossed and re-crossed at more than one point. Right then it had weak timber pile bridges at Amarpur, Udaipur and Kakraban, barely capable of taking jeeps; most traffic moved on ferries which operated alongside these bridges. Neither the bridges nor the ferries could take continuous heavy traffic of vehicles carrying troops to operational locations to stock up the maintenance areas. Most vehicles used for stocking supplies were hired civilian vehicles and had a laden

weight of 12 to 15 tons. The existing bridges could not take vehicles even of laden weight of 4 or 5 tons.

We had limited bridging equipment at this stage. The odd Bailey or Folding Boat Equipment set was not enough to meet our requirement for crossings on the Gumti. Besides, we wanted to preserve this equipment for a really tight situation, since we did not have enough of it, or for use after we had crossed into East Pakistan. We had to improvise.

I decided to build bridges on country boats, and designed them, and along with my Bengali-speaking officers, went looking for people who could make such boats. It did not take us long to locate them in Sonamura, which place is also famous for its rosgullas. It is a small, sleepy town - more like a village - on the bank of the Gumti, and finding workers here belonging to families engaged in boat-building activity since antiquity, totally surprised me. The dark-skinned, bare-bodied (except for the lungi folded upwards at the knees), wizened old man sporting a wispy beard, had a look of amusement all along, while his young companion was telling us about the large boats and steamers they built for operation in the mighty Meghna, and about the repair work they did on them. He said they had migrated to the Indian side of the border as the conditions across were totally unsettling. I felt very satisfied when some elders of the village, Hindus and Muslims alike, assured me that they were builders of repute and all the more so when I learnt they had a lot of seasoned planking with them to get on with the job right away. It was indeed fortuitous, and fortunate. I decided to have bridges of country boats at Sonamura and Kakraban, while at Amarpur I decided on a Folding Boat Equipment bridge as this crossing was required very early for the build-up south of the river. For heavier vehicles and medium guns I decided to supplement the Sonamura crossing with a Bailey raft of class 30 specifications, operating on a captive basis. The boat bridges were to take vehicles with laden weight upto 18 tons and were to be ready in three to four weeks.

Incessant rains

By 4 September the movement of men and materials in Tripura had become more intense. The advance elements of Corps

Headquarters started arriving. There were more vehicles at the maintenance stocking areas. But the rains were intense and playing havoc. The entire humanity in that part of the world stayed wet throughout the 24 hours of the day. The entire countryside was one endless sheet of water. And when the rain did cease, and, once in a while, the sun showed up, the only place which dried up somewhat was the asphalted road and its verdant berms, and immediately people spread their grain upon it to dry, and brought out their cattle to graze on the berms. Through all this the vehicles plied on, unmindful of the grains, or the quacking ducks, or the ruminating cattle, or the throngs of people going about their daily chores. The roads were mostly on embankments, and wherever the drainage was good, they withstood the rigours of the traffic well. Poorly-drained roads corrugated easily.

Though men had started arriving, and equipment and headquarters had got on the move, and there was an interminable clamour for roads - in units, in maintenance/stocking areas, along the communication axes - our dozers and other heavy earth-moving equipment had not arrived. This was a serious handicap, more so when time was at such a premium. Besides, to add enormity to the problems, there was this incessant rain, the continuous, unabated downpour which made any vehicular movement off the road almost impossible and which turned vast stretches of the country into veritable quagmires. Whatever little light earth-moving machinery we had, was hard to use under such circumstances.

There were hundreds of thousands of refugees, and it was to them that we turned. We used them in hundreds, thousands! We got them to cut roads, build boats, and then put up bridges on those boats, to dig piles into the soil and construct bridges on them, to construct huts with bamboos and thatch and clad them with bamboo mats, build accommodation for stores, offices, hospitals. To preserve men and materials from moisture of the earth, we spread prefabricated bituminised hessian mats. It was a ceaseless, continuous activity, almost over the entire state of Tripura. Drinking water was a very serious problem. We dug wells alongside the streams, in the stream beds, and got hold of boring rigs for tubewells. In course of time the earth moving equipment of the desired

specifications arrived, and that helped, and the work got done at a better speed.

For stocking up the areas south of river Gumti, the bridge at Amarpur - of folding boats - was considered inadequate as it could take only class 9 loads; the laden weight of the vehicles engaged in stocking was generally around 15 tons. We got over this problem by inserting one additional boat in each span, just under the span joints. The bridge was ready by 14 September.

Civilian engineers

By about 9 September the major portion of the Corps Headquarters had moved and had been housed in tents. Work on hutted accommodation, duly provided with electricity, was progressing satisfactorily. The principal engineer of the state had been placed in support of the Army, but he seemed to be too occupied establishing refugee camps and providing them the basic facilities. When I had the occasion to see the Lieutenant Governor he was apologetic and explained how the state resources had been subjected to extreme pressures and that his staff was not at all in a position to help the Army. This he said in the presence of the Corps Commander who maintained a fairly nonchalant demeanour. I learnt later that one of my officers had, roughed up the engineer a bit, and he was sulking. But the amusing aspect was the support he got from the Lieutenant Governor! However, my staff were not the least bit ruffled. They felt they had no need for the engineer, anyway, as, in a tight situation, an odd bottle of rum could get anyone on the run during any time of the day or night. Indeed we had no problems whatsoever from anyone in the PWD. All we got was the fullest cooperation. The infrastructure for the impending operations was developed with the optimum utilisation of our total potential.

The country where we were planning to go looked like a total quagmire during that month of September. It had the mighty river Meghna and its equally mighty tributaries, all in flood, and there were numerous dots of villages (almost each house had its own fish pond) and, barring the main highways - Comilla to Chittagong, or Daudkandi, or Chandpur, or Ashuganj, or Dharmanagar to Sylhet - all subsidiary roads and tracks were under water and small

country boats plied over them. Even a thought of launching an operation in that kind of country, with our resources, was not entertainable.

Training

We would have to have the capability to construct roads, tracks, diversions, or put existing road systems into operation in the minimum time. That required training. Besides, there would be demolished bridges, mined defences, booby-trapped approaches, and water obstacles to negotiate. All that required training: Training to handle the impediments, to respond to orders with speed, to work as a team. We established a training camp at Amarpur, north of river Gumti and there the corps engineer regiments got down to training. The Divisions were, however, averse to sending down their regiments to this area, saying they would train their engineers in areas not far away from where they were concentrated and where their engineers were fully employed in carrying out their operational tasks.

Our one worry at this stage was the move forward of the engineer stores and equipment from Dharmanagar. The Corps staff in their wisdom, had allocated a low priority to this. The result was that till about the first week of October not much engineering equipment had arrived in the theatre of operations from the railhead at Dharmanagar. This was viewed seriously at the Command Headquarters at Calcutta and they came down somewhat heavily, to the chagrin of the Corps staff. Even the Corps Commander was somewhat irked, and summoned me and said he did not like his Headquarters sneaking out information to senior headquarters on matters which were specifically of his concern. I told him there was no question of sneaking out anything as Command Headquarters were fully in the picture regarding stores build-up and that the information to this effect was being passed to them everyday by his own staff at the Corps Headquarters, and at Dharmanagar. I then gave out the picture of the availability of engineer stores in the Corps theatre of operations and explained to him that if immediate steps were not taken, engineers would not be ready for operations for another two to three months. He appreciated my point of view and soon thereafter things started moving.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind, however, that movement of stores and equipment was no easy matter, particularly because of the short time available in which everything had to move, and the paucity of transport, and this in spite of the fact that the bulk of the civil transport available in the north-eastern region was being utilised for this purpose.

So while the stores arrived, we trained, building bridges and rafts, ferrying rafts and boats in the Gumti, arming and disarming mines that we knew the Pakistanis possessed, laying and neutralising demolition charges, rehearsing drills for the rapid repairs of airfields and runways, finalising procedures for distribution of potable water during mobile battle, and providing electricity to hospitals, depots and headquarters.

I was not too happy about the time the divisions were allowing their engineers to train. But every time I brought this up the divisions said they could not ignore the tasks which their engineers had to perform to improve their operational preparedness. Actually, often they were put on tasks of little consequence or which could be carried out by the units in their normal routines. The Brigadier General Staff at the Corps Headquarters thought it prudent to side with the divisional commanders who were the future bosses of the Army, rather than a mere chief engineer who, being a technical man, was hardly likely to make any difference to his career prospects. But the Corps Commander was not averse to the idea of training, and when the formation commanders told him about the Chief Engineer exerting pressure for more time for training, I think he told them firmly to get on with it. Some kind of training did get imparted from then onwards.

2. Historical background

The land

The Ganga-Brahmaputra deltic region has been formed by the tectonic activity of the earth's crust which folded upwards to form the Himalayas, and, correspondingly, created a trough immediately to the south of it. Two major rivers flow through this trough. The upward movement of the earth's crust also produced the arc of Arakan-Yoma-Andaman-Sumatra, resulting in a subsidence which caused the Bay of Bengal. The two river systems have been silting up this bay and the result is the deltic region. The delta proper is a level, flat land, lying between 4 and 40 feet above the sea. The whole area is made up of sedimented silt and clay. Tripura is flat, so made by the disintegrating Athara Mura range and its minor subsidiaries, running north-south. The height above the mean sea level varies between 800 and 1500 feet in the hilly area and it gradually drops to around 200 feet in the flat land. Underneath the top soil, which varies in depth between 10 and 20 feet and has a fair proportion of sand, it is clay, totally impervious, varying in depth between 200 and 350 feet. Below this depth the stratum is again water-bearing.

Across the border, in East Bengal, the terrain is totally riverine. There are numerous rivers and streams and all of them drain into the Meghna river. During the non-monsoon season, when there is hardly any flow in the lesser streams, the water in them just stagnates and these are turned into veritable lakes and quagmires.

Rainfall varies between 120 to 400 centimetres and almost 75 per cent of it occurs during the monsoons (June-September). During October/November the weather tends to turn cyclonic which can cause torrential downpours, and wind velocities which can simply wreak havoc. Tripura and the deltic region has hot, humid, monsoonal climate, but

the proximity to the Bay in the south and the Himalayas in the north, tend to make the temparature, humidity and rainfall uneven. From December to around the middle of March the rains are virtually not there, and the air has a nip, and humidity is down to a low, very bearable 40 to 50 per cent. During December/January the temperature varies between 18 and 25 degrees celsius.

While the tectonic activity caused the trough of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, it also caused the foundering of the land mass immediately north of the deltic region, causing the two rivers to turn sharply south, making for the Bay. East Bengal, thus, has three river systems, namely, the Ganga, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. While the former two are long rivers, the Meghna drains just the southern slopes of Meghalaya. Its origin is not in snow-clad mountains. Meghalaya, as the name implies, is where the clouds live and pour, and Meghna is what takes that downpour into the sea. At Bhairab Bazaar, about 65 kilometres upstream of Dacca, there is a rail bridge which connects Dacca with Chittagong. The length of the bridge is 2,950 feet, almost a kilometre, but as the river flows down, its width increases phenomenally. South of Chandpur, after its confluence with Padma, which is a combine of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, it is like a sea; the far bank is just not visible to the naked eye.

The other bridge of significance is the Hardinge Bridge over the Ganga, north of Kushtia. Though rail or road communication is not possible in this country and although most small streams and rivers do have bridges, across major rivers transportation is on steamers or ferries. Rivers are deep and flow from bank to bank, and there are no boulders or rocks to obstruct traffic. Steamer services and ferries operate extensively.

The people

The delta's original inhabitants were the Australoid Indians, but later there came the Dravidians from the west and south-west, and Mongoloid people through the Chumbi and the Brahmaputra valleys and over the eastern routes of ingress. A large portion of the population is an intermixture of these ethnic entities. Later, Aryan and other fair-skinned races also held sway, and here and

there some of their ethnic admixture is also seen. In the country east of the Meghna, Buddhism had effectively taken over from the Hindu religious concept, which was based primarily on the worship of the Mother Goddess - a thought possibly of Hun or Scythian origin - by the eighth century, by which time this religion also held sway over the northern and eastern parts of the peninsula. Starting from Afghanistan in the north-west to the eastern parts of East Bengal, Buddhist colleges and monasteries dotted the whole land. The eastern part of East Bengal was ruled by the Deva kings during the seventh and eighth centuries. Hiuen Tsang came to south-east Bengal in AD 635 and he speaks of 30 Buddhist monasteries in that part of the country. Monasteries, ruins of which abundantly dot the area, are quite similar in layout and design - there are cells for residence, halls for discussions, temples for worship; a cell is normally 16 feet 6 inches by 10 feet 6 inches and is separated from the adjoining cell by a 5 feet 6 inches thick wall, and is provided with corbelled niches or oil lamps and Buddha's image. After the Devas, the Pala kings held sway over the area, till they were overtaken by the Chandra kings who ruled during the ninth and tenth centuries, till they gave in to the Varmanas in the eleventh century. Vaishnavite kings ruled during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Buddhism did not wipe out Hinduism from this country, and even when it lasted it carried strong strains of the latter religion.

Islam was brought to this country by the seafaring Arabs and made its entry through the sea and river ports. Muslim conquests of Bengal also contributed towards its spread. Islam's message of equality amongst men, and brotherhood, caught the imagination particularly of the peasantry, for Hinduism by then had decayed into a cult of rituals besides having become overly discriminatory in dealing with people of different castes. Barring feudal and high caste families, the country embraced Islam almost en bloc. But like Buddhism in the past, in spite of the strict regimen and code of worship and conduct laid down by Islam, fairly strong strains of Hindu thought and conduct pattern persisted amongst the converts. Whereas the peasants, mostly Muslim, held resentment against the landlords, mostly Hindus, it was mostly so at the economic and political level and very rarely at the religious level, unless religion was deliberately exploited for

political ends as was done at the partitions in 1905 and 1947. Otherwise that is a land where Muslims and Hindus celebrate each other's festivals with equal enthusiasm. In a land with a limited area and nearly unlimited population, the process of survival takes away most of the time. There times can be hard with floods or drought, with no time left for fighting. the villagers give and take from each other in terms of friendship, warmth and understanding, in a large measure. They are proud of elements common to both the communities. They are proud of being Bengalis, of their language, of their poets and scholars. The Bengali Muslim I met at the Salban Vihar museum, near Maynamati, was as proud of his religion, as he was of his Buddhist ancestry, or the great Bengali poet Tagore; he talked of Tagore with pride and reverence.

But physically they are no match to the Pakistanis from the north-west of the subcontinent. In the past too, almost the first area that fell in conquest to a ruler at Delhi or anywhere else, was Bengal, and the intervening areas too hardly offered any worthwhile resistance. The Bengali, the carefree, romantic, peace-loving being, hardly ever managed to live in freedom. He was talented, but was an easy prey to plunder. Even when the world around him hardened on account of the changes in science and technology forced upon it, he revelled in his poetry, and songs and drama. He revelled in being a pacifist. And since he never had the courage, or the wherewithal, to force his will upon others, he tended to indulge in the politics of intrigue which, because it is conducted in fear, on the basis of incomplete information or stunted ideas, normally results in disaster.

The East Bengali's love for his land and language is almost fanatical, which is true of the Western Bengali as well. In fact, so confident was Suhrawardy of the Bengali's love for Bengali, that he was sure he could, after some negotiations and adjustments, evolve a plan for a separate Bengali nation. Had the Indian National Congress not opposed this move, there would, perhaps, have been a separate, independent, sovereign country of Bengal.

The first partition

The first partition of Bengal came in 1905 when Lord Curzon was the viceroy of India. Until then Bengal, Bihar and

Orissa were administered as one unit under a lieutenant governor. The Viceroy felt it was too big an area and took away from it the divisions of Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi, and joined them with Assam, and called the new province 'East Bengal and Assam' with Dacca as its capital. This partition was strongly resented by everyone in India, including the Bengalis, mostly from West Bengal. To counter the opposition, under a scheme which was the brainchild of the British, Nawab Salim Ullah of Dacca founded the Muslim League which supported the partition of Bengal and was against the boycott of British goods. Although under sane British influence, and strong political pressure exerted by the people of India, the partition was undone in 1911, the Muslim League in general and the Bengali Muslim leadership in particular, served as effective tools in British hands with which to oppose the Indian national aspirations.

Backgrounder to the second partition

Neither Iqbal the poet, nor the authors of the concept of Pakistan, had visualised East Bengal becoming a part of Pakistan. When the idea of East Bengal becoming a part of it was first given out, it was considered as some kind of a joke. To a question as to how a state could have its constituent units separated by 1,200 miles of Indian territory, the Muslim League said they would want a corridor to join the two wings. Basically the Muslim League was an organisation backed by the diehard British with the express aim of, firstly, impeding the Indian independence movement, and, secondly, if granting independence to the subcontinent became inevitable, to create conditions which would force the British Government to leave a part of the country with elements who would afford it the facility to watch the interests of the Empire in this region. The founding fathers of the League might not have visualised that they were sowing the seeds of a movement which would not only split the country but result in the deaths of millions of human beings, uproot millions from their ancestral homes, and bring about unbearable destitution and suffering upon millions divested of their means of livelihood, and incapacitated through hunger, disease and injury in the process of flying from one country to the other. This was the historical process where the country was paying for the

sins of its forebears who had accepted slavery, for whatever reason. To begin with the British exploited it to the maximum, and when they left, the process turned a part of it into ruins. The story was no different in other places where British rule or influence existed, like in the Middle East, or some countries of Africa. In the Middle East the states carved by the British after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, are still at each other's throats after 55 years of their inception.

By virtue of Muslim majority, the Muslim League ruled Bengal. Politicians flourished. The black market soared. In 1943 there was famine in which 1.5 million Bengalis lost their lives. During August/September 1946 the worst kind of communal riots broke out in Calcutta and Noakhali where Muslims killed Hindus with impunity. How much of the top Muslim leadership was involved in this exercise is difficult to say, but it is quite clear that a definite attempt was made by the vested interests in the Muslim community to scare the Hindus out of East Bengal, including Calcutta, and take charge of their property; Hindus were the richer of the two communities. This would also have given Calcutta a Muslim majority, and then the case for its inclusion in Pakistan would have been thoroughly justified. There was that so-called Sher-e-Bengal, Fazal-ul-Huq, and there was Suhrawardy, and there were their numerous henchmen, the organisers and functionaries of the Muslim League, who spouted hatred and preached violence against Hindus, and the Congress, throughout their waking hours in those days. A great convulsion in the form of a change of government was about to take place, and the Muslim League and its followers, who constituted the bulk of the population of Bengal, were out to take the fullest advantage of this, and loot and plunder, no doubt with the tacit approval and under the discreet guidance of the British diehards. While the Hindus huddled around their property, the Muslims were poised to pillage and destroy. However, the degree of valour and bravery of both sides was revealed by the fact that in Calcutta, while the Hindus engaged Gorkha and Sikh chowkidars to safeguard their property - one man looking after upto 100 houses and the families - the aggressive Muslims considered it prudent to avoid these sturdy northeners. So, what was out of the hands of the police force and the political leaders, was partly held in check by these brave handful of 'chowkidars'.

Calcutta riots started on 16 August 1946, the day of 'Direct Action' ordered by Muslim League to protest against the reconstitution of the Executive Council by the Viceroy of India, without the Muslim League. In the first week of September 1946 the blow fell on the Hindus of Noakhali and Comilla. Thousands perished. Hundreds of thousands were uprooted from their home and hearth and fled to West Bengal or neighbouring Assam, Orissa and Bihar.

Mahatma Gandhi was distressed and stunned by the intensity of violence. He sent a band of Satyagrahis to Noakhali where 18 per cent of the Hindus owned 75 per cent of the property. The Congress President, Kripalani and his wife also went there. Gandhi arrived at Noakhali on 6 November. He established his camp in Srirampur village, and from here he toured the countryside, meeting people, addressing congregations, exhorting everyone to restore communal harmony. His healing touch had the desired effect, and peace came to that part of the country. But merciless killings of the Hindus, which had started mainly after 2 September, when Nehru and his colleagues had been inducted in the Viceroy's Council, continued unabated elsewhere.

Then Hindus struck in retaliation in Bihar, ferociously, venomously, and within a few days hundreds of thousands of Bihari Muslims had been uprooted, and they had nowhere else to go except East Bengal. Gandhi was distressed again and left Noakhali for Patna, in Bihar, on 2 March 1947. Here too he went around the villages, and here too he brought peace and calm to the people. Partly because of the backlash in Bihar, and partly because of Gandhi, killings stopped in East Bengal, and thereafter also in Bihar.

Apparently Gandhi's experience with the riots forced him to change his mind about the partition of the country. He was vehemently opposed to it. But after Noakhali and Bihar, and what happened in north west India, he apparently gave in, and told the All India Congress Committee, which met on 14-15 June 1947, to endorse the recommendations of the Congress Working Committee in favour of partition. He must have come to this conclusion after a lot of vacillation though, for as late as 8 May 1947

he, after a meeting with the Viceroy, wrote from the train, while on the way to Bengal, that if partition had to come it should happen after the British withdrawal, and as a result of understanding between the concerned parties, or even after an armed conflict.

On 15 August 1947 Gandhi was in Calcutta, and spent the day spinning and observing a fast. On 31 August he was preparing to leave for Noakhali when intense riots broke out in the city. Gandhi stayed back. At 10 in the night a mob attacked the house where he was staying, asking him to give up his peace mission which had really been a mission for protecting the Muslims, when thousands of Hindus were being massacred by that community wherever they were in majority. To bring peace to Calcutta, Gandhi undertook a fast unto death from 1 September and broke it only on 4 September - 73 hours later - after calm had come to the city.

However, from 4 September refugees migrating from West Pakistan had made it difficult for the Muslims in Delhi. On 13 January Gandhi took on another fast to stop migration to Pakistan of Muslims from Delhi and adjoining areas, which was being forced upon them by the non-Muslim population. A sizeable minority in the Congress party, including Sardar Patel, were of the view that now that the population exchange had started at that gigantic scale on account of historic developments, the process should not be interfered with or impeded, and a complete exchange of population should be allowed to take place - after all, the northern Muslims had asked for the homeland, and now that they had got it, they had no business to continue to stay on in India! This minority was getting restive by the day on account of Gandhi's interference. An additional reason for Gandhi's fast was the Rs 55 crore which the Indian Government owed to Pakistan and had held back in the wake of the latter country's attack on Kashmir in September 1947. Gandhi wanted this money transferred without any reservations.

Gandhi ended his fast with a glass of orange juice from Abul Kalam Azad, after the leaders of different communities had signed pledges in favour of peace and harmony. His concern for the minority community, however, at a time when that community's conduct in northern India

was being viewed as almost treacherous, left the people, particularly those migrating from West Pakistan or their sympathisers, disenchanted and bewildered. In the heat of the moment they had forgotten about those Muslims, millions of them, who had struggled alongside them for the freedom of the country. So inflamed were their passions that they totally failed to understand Gandhi and his philosophy at that point of time. On 20 January a Hindu refugee from West Pakistan was caught at the prayer meeting with an unexploded hand grenade on his person. On 30 January Gandhi was shot dead while he was on his way to the evening prayer meeting, by a fanatical Maharashtrian Hindu.

Thus ended the life of one of the greatest men in the history of mankind. He lived and died for the human cause. But, ironically, the Muslims of northern India, or Pakistan hardly ever realised the depth of what he had done for them. Their very existence in northern India was threatened in 1947, and with that was threatened the very existence of Pakistan. For them, and Pakistan, he was the saviour at that historical juncture.

The partition of Bengal in 1947 resulted in the migration of around 4 million Hindus from East Bengal to India and of around 1 million Muslims, mostly Biharis, from India to East Bengal. In the process some 800,000 people were butchered.

Post-1947 period Trouble between the two wings of Pakistan started almost from the inception. The very first issue that cropped up was language. The Bengalis saw no reason why Urdu should be imposed upon them. They wanted Bengali, even if alongside Urdu, as their language. This was not acceptable to the Federal Government; even Jinnah turned it down when he visited Dacca in February 1948. There were bloody riots. Besides, the Bengalis wanted proportionate representation. They said it was the eastern wing that earned, mostly through its jute trade, and it was the western wing that benefited from the earnings. Whatever industrialisation took place was mostly in the west. The east got only a fraction of the share in industry, and that too was owned by the Punjabis or people from the west. Feud between the two wings became bitter by the day. The Awami League was formed with the

avowed purpose of securing the rights of the people of the east. While the Bengalis wanted a larger share in the Federal Budget, the Punjabi-dominated west said that all foreign aid came to Pakistan because of the facilities provided to the Americans and their allies, in the western wing. They said that Bengalis made bad soldiers and recruited for the Defence Services, officers and rank and file, mostly from the west, the bulk of them from Punjab. The Bengalis said this was done basically to keep the Bengali down with force. In fact, by 1958 when General Ayub Khan took over the Government through a bloodless coup, the bitterness between the two wings had gone to such a pitch that near anarchy prevailed in both the wings. Ayub's takeover saved Pakistan from total disintegration. Ayub, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Army, ruled the country for over ten years with an iron hand. All political activity was banned and obstreperous politicians were put behind bars, more so politicians from East Bengal, as their clamour for equitable distribution of resources and opportunities was getting louder by the day and this was particularly annoying to the Punjabis.

For the Punjabi had been in a grasping mood. At the time of the partition he had thrown out more people from his side of Punjab than he had taken in. Large tracts of land and enormous wealth and property left behind by the Hindus and the Sikhs had come into his possession. He was drunk with power, steeped in insolence, and delirious on account of his luck. Partition had done him well. By forcibly evicting the Hindus and the Sikhs he had brought prosperity unto himself.

It was in 1940 in Lahore that the League for the first time raised the demand for Pakistan. The resolution was moved by Fazal-ul-Huq of Bengal, and it visualised the two federating eastern and western wings to be autonomous. The idea had been put forward possibly by Iqbal in December 1930 when he was the president of the League, more with a view to highlighting the need for recognition of the Muslim community as a separate entity and extracting maximum benefits for it from the rulers of the country, than effecting a partition. But with the passage of time, the attitudes hardened, not because of the logic of the Muslim League's demand, but the overt and covert support given by the British Government to the League in

particular, and any other group voicing separation, in general. The complex Cabinet Mission Plan, announced on 16 May 1946, which envisaged a federation of three major semi-autonomous units, and the Indian States, with the option to everyone to opt out of the Union after the first elections of the Legislative Councils, was acceptable to the Muslim League, but the Congress turned it down. By 1946-47 the leadership of the League, though overtly still under Jinnah, was clearly out of the hands of the moderates.

The diehard British

Basically the plea of the Muslim League was that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations and could not coexist in one country, under one government. The argument eminently supported the interests of the diehard British, who, having seen the inevitability of the independence of the subcontinent, strained hard to create a real estate where they could have a firm base to watch the interests of the Empire in this part of the world; they, perhaps, had no idea that the Empire was a vanishing phenomenon. Then there were those who lived and died only for the Empire, and to them the very idea of its liquidation was not acceptable, like the idea of independent East Bengal was not acceptable to the Punjabis of West Pakistan. To them the Empire was the symbol of the greatness of the British people. To them it was a structure their forebears had built laboriously over a couple of centuries, and they felt they had every right to own it. To them an Indian was some kind of a sub-human whose being in bondage was of no consequence. They viewed the Indian struggle for freedom with hostility. They cried from roof-tops that they fought the Second World War to deliver mankind from the menace of fascism, but for all practical purposes worked for a fascist hold over the colonies. They bitterly condemned Nazi Germany for the genocide of the Jews, but did not bat an eyelid when millions of Bengalis perished in the great famine of 1943 - because of malfunctioning and corruption of the Government - or others were butchered in the partition massacres.

These diehard rightists caused much trouble for India. They said India was not one nation. It was like Europe, composed of different ethnic and linguistic

groups with widely different customs, social and cultural backgrounds, and multifarious religious concepts. It had been put together as one unit only by the British, and that too basically for administrative convenience. They forecast a cataclysm and said Indians would exterminate each other. They instigated the Muslims into proclaiming themselves a separate nation. They sold the idea of separate nationhood to Sikhs as well. Under the patronage of the diehards, the Sikhs and the Muslims were brought together and there was a lot of fraternising between certain sections of both the communities. A section of the Sikh community declared their religion was closer to Islam than Hinduism, that beef-eating was not forbidden to them and so on. In a subtle way, Sikhs were being asked to put in a demand for an independent country for themselves.

On 3 June 1947, the British Government announced the partition plan and their intention to grant independence on 15 August 1947 and almost immediately thereafter, the League or its military wing, or some other organisation of the Punjabi Muslims, put its grab plan into operation. They wanted the non-Muslims out of the areas which were to come to them. Sikhs were the first targets as they were suspects, for they were wanting Sikh homeland in areas that the Muslim League wanted for Pakistan. Besides they were rich and owned vast landed property.

3. The psychological factor

When it was all over, the Punjabi Muslim had gained hands down in terms of property. The urban and rural middle and lower middle classes had basically benefited from this plunder. They had cleverly used the Muslim peasantry and the urban labour class to achieve this. They hired them, or instigated them. The Sikhs fought desperately but they were outnumbered, outmanoeuvred, overwhelmed. Hindu lalas and banias had formidable strongholds in big towns, but they fled.

Trouble in East Pakistan. In this mood of exultation and over-confidence, the Punjabi Muslim arrived in East Bengal. Trouble started almost immediately, when the Bengalis put in a demand for Bengali to be the second national language. This was turned down by Jinnah himself during his very first visit in February 1948. One nation, he said, could not have two national languages. Riots followed. When the Bengali openly expressed his disenchantment with the pro-West Pakistan policies of the Government, he was told it had to be so as the danger to the country's integrity was from the west or western India and not from the east. Both Suhrawardy and Fazl-ul-Huq were out of favour within three years of the formation of Pakistan - an irreparable breach had formed between its two wings. What originally started as a demand for equitable distribution of the resources of the two wings, soon turned into a clamour for an autonomous East Bengal; in fact the demand was for semi-autonomy for all the federating units. This suggestion which could ultimately tear apart the country at the seams, was resented by the western wing, because it could embolden the constituent units of the western wing too to demand autonomy, and totally finish Pakistan. They said the Bengalis were being deceitful and dishonest. What had not been done for them? They did not grow enough food to meet even their own requirements! The West gave them food, and at subsidised rates!

The Punjabi just could not stand the small and dark, unduly argumentative though timid, lungi-clad, rice-and-curry-eating Bengali. The West Pakistani proudly claimed his lineage from the Middle East from where Islam sprouted, spread and ruled. The Bengali culture born in the midst of rice fields, numerous rivers and streams and open skies, and the Bengali lifestyle attuned to humidity and rain, was totally foreign to him. The Bengali Muslim's way of life barely differed from the Hindu's: women wearing dhotis and going about with uncovered faces and limbs; wearing the red bindi on the forehead and otherwise decorating the exposed limbs; speaking a language derived from Sanskrit, participating lustily and having a sneaky faith in festivals celebrated by the Hindus! So he hated him for being argumentative, for the way he looked and lived, for the noise he made of his culture and the way he lauded the Hindu Bengali poets and scholars, and for the way he reeled out political proposals which cut at the very roots of Pakistan, or so he thought, and would lead to its complete dismemberment. The Bengali just would not be permitted to do that!

Ayub

General Ayub was born in a humble family and was educated at the Aligarh Muslim Uniersity. His father became a risaldar major in the Indian Army. Ayub was the commander-in-chief of the Pak Army during 1951-58. During 1954-56 he was also the defence minister. In collaboration with President Iskandar Mirza he staged a coup in October 1958 and soon thereafter sent Mirza to exile in London. Politics was not Ayub's strong point; he hated politics and politicians. He was a strong supporter of military alliances. In the summer of 1961, while visiting the US he told the joint session of the US congress that Pakistan was the only country in Asia upon whom they could depend in times of crisis. On 23 October 1959 he proposed border talks with China, but there was no response as the Chinese did not approve of the Pakistani desire to have a joint defence with India against them, and their support to the two-Chinas policy.

In March 1962, two and a half years after the Pak proposal had been made, the Chinese agreed to discuss the border; possibly conflict with India had pushed them

towads this. The negotiations started on 13 October, just a week before the Chinese attack, and on 26 October, both the countries announced complete agreement in principle on the aligning of the border. The Agreement was signed on 2 March 1963. Under it Pakistan ceded 2,650 square miles of Indian territory to China while China allowed 750 square miles of such territory to Pakistan.

General Ayub took over the reins of government in 1958, declared martial law and saved the situation which was fast turning into abject anarchy. His military government set out on a course of repression so harsh that even the western wing cried out in protest. Ayub made promises of people's rule, reeled out a couple of gimmicks about basic democracy, and staved off the crisis for full ten years. By then he and his supporters had been totally isolated. People in both the wings had become restive against the policies of the military regime and yearned for a civil government run by duly elected representatives. The leader of this movement, whose machinations were too complex even for the ever vigilant military dictatorship, was Z.A. Bhutto.

Bhutto

To the people of India, Bhutto had come into prominence at the time of the 1965 conflict as Ayub's foreign minister. He was known for marathon speeches at the UN, and vicious attacks on India. He was young, yet he had formidable contacts within the country's powerful military blocks, and outside the country, particularly in the US. He was bold and ruthlessly ambitious. He was a hawk who believed that Indians could be chased out of the remaining part of Kashmir, or brought to submission, by mere scowling combined with a show of force. Born in 1928, Bhutto was educated in Bombay, California and Oxford. He became a national hero by dissociating himself from the decision to cease fire from 3 AM on 23 September 1965, during the war with India. He wept at the Security Council and vowed to fight India for 1,000 years if necessary, before he read out Ayub's telegram accepting the Council's cease-fire resolution.

A few days before the cease-fire, the Chinese had done a bit of sword rattling to pressurise India. Liu Shao-Chi

and Chen Yi visited Pakistan towards the end of March 1966 to an unprecedented welcome. The Morning News of Karachi greeted the visitors by printing its whole first page in Chinese letters. A million people turned up to greet them at Lahore. Bhutto accompanied them and shared the applause. He told the crowds that Chinese assistance during the war had made Sino-Pak friendship unbreakable. He claimed to be the author of relations with China, and the independent foreign policy of Pakistan. He was of the view that friendship with India was out of the question till India stopped suppressing the cultural, linguistic and religious identity of her Muslims, and agreed to settle the disputes with Pakistan on the basis of equality. He was dead set on securing Kashmir, for its inclusion in India, according to him, gave a lie to the two-nation theory, on the basis of which Pakistan had come into being. He was sure Pakistan could get Kashmir as, in his opinion, a Pakistani was inherently superior to the Indian, and would be supported in the venture by Kashmiri Muslims and Muslims in other countries, as also by China, USA and western European cuntries.

General Ayub and other senior officers of the Pakistani armed forces were, however, against such galloping optimism. They argued that India's debacle in 1962, and her surrender of half of Jammu and Kashmir in 1949, were basically caused by politicians whose pusillanimity was understandable as most of them sprang from urban stock who let out a lot of hot air in terms of protests and non-cooperation and such activities, but quaked in the face of physical, life-threatening violence. But a confrontation with the rural-based Indian Army would be a different matter.

Almost throughout its recorded history, the Indian subcontinent has been a conglomerate of states which had large populations of traders and artisans and which were extensively plundered by organised raiders from within and without the country. Because of lack of organisation and communications, the rapport between the trader and the peasantry has been poor and the latter, the muscle power of the society, saw the former being pillaged without feeling any concern. Once divested of his wealth, the trader-artisan community was of no further interest to the plundering horders, and they left them alone, for them to

recreate the wealth and make themselves once again vulnerable to plundering. But now the situation was different, for the country was much better integrated thanks to the facilities provided by modern science, or so the military brass in Pakistan told the hawks. Being of the old Indian Army, they knew what stuff its soldier was made up of.

However, the hawks, led by Bhutto, carried the day. A 1947-49 type of operation was launched on 1 September 1965, and it misfired, though not as badly as it would have against an alert nation. Obviously, Pakistan had come a long way from the summer of 1948 when its Army, which had come to Kashmir in aid of the raiders, was put on the run. Had not the Indians, inexplicably, sought UN intervention then and brought about an immediate cease-fire, they would have been in complete control of Jammu and Kashmir in a few more weeks, and thus avoided losing that part which is now called 'Pakistan occupied Kashmir' in India and 'Azad Kashmir' in Pakistan. And the pity of it all was that even at the UN, the Indian diplomats could not carry the day and India was hounded from resolution to resolution, till she was saved from the precarious situation brought upon her by Pakistan and its allies, by a series of Russian vetoes. It took long years for India to manage an awkward sort of withdrawal of this issue from the UN, but those resolutions of the UN still stand against her, and almost half of the state of Jammu and Kashmir still continues to be occupied by Pakistan.

However, in 1965, the Pakistanis were jolted out of unrestrained optimism. Partly on account of propaganda, and partly on the stilted conclusions drawn from a study of history and recent events, they had believed that India was the sick man of South Asia, a country of actors, singers, musicians, non-violent and superstitious Hindus, lacking valour and grit, who just would not face physical violence. Bhutto and others like him said one Pakistani was equal to ten Indians, and confidently and ambitiously, along with the ingress of the raiders, they launched two thrusts, one across Chhamb, designed to cut off virtually the whole of the Indian part of Jammu and Kashmir at Jammu, and the other across Khem Karan Patti, directed against Beas on river Beas, between Amritsar and Jullundur, designed to cut off the whole of the Indian Army

to the west of it. This latter move, if successful, would have left virtually little defence capability between Beas and Delhi and would, so it was hoped, have exposed Delhi to an abject surrender. Both the moves partially achieved their aims, in that they had the Indian military as well as political leadership shaking in their pants (or dhotis). Even a withdrawal to the line of Beas was being talked about at one time. In their initial flush, the Pakistanis piled humiliations on the men and women, mostly Sikhs, whom they had captured from across the border at Khem Karan. However, the situation turned as the plot thickened, and the Indians secured some vital successes. At Khem Karan, they Pakistanis lost heavily in men and equipment while they maintained a hold on a small part of the Indian territory. On the Chhamb front a kind of stalemate developed with Pakistan in control of the entire territory that they had captured in the initial rush and the Indians staying totally content with the fact that they had contained the aggressor, and making no worthwhile attempt to evict them, even after the Sialkot front had opened and some move of the Pakistanis out of the sector had taken place.

General Ayub was annoyed, as also his military commanders, at having been forced into hostilities prematurely through the machinations of Bhutto who, therefore, lost his job as Foreign Minister. Another reason - perhaps the main one - why he got the sack was the irritation that the Indo-Pak war had caused to the US Government, who had been militarily strengthening the two countries essentially as a bulwark against Chinese expansion in South and South East Asia. Ayub, even if he had wanted to, would not have been able to resist US pressure against Bhutto. But Bhutto made it real hot for Ayub, and by 1968 even the western wing was agitating against the dictator. So Ayub, in ill health, his son openly accused of corruption, abdicated in March 1969 and handed over charge to Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan, the commander-in-chief of the Army.

One of the avowed missions of the British in India was to contain Russia within its boundaries and arrest their expansion southwards, towards the Middle East, or south-eastwards, towards Iran and Afghanistan. Their relationship with the countries of the region was

basically determined by this requirement. The requirement continued to exist even after the subcontinent had become free, only now it assumed global importance, and the US and the Western European countries also became interested. To all of them Pakistani friendship was important in this context, and Pakistan took full advantage of the situation by giving unstinted support to the Western bloc. They had secured the friendship of the Islamic countries of the Middle East and in some of them, Pakistanis played important roles in sensitive areas. With the emergence of Bhutto there had been manifold increase in such activity. Pakistanis admired him, for friendship with Western bloc countries brought them security against India which, they felt, was not reconciled to the fact of partition and would spare no effort to destabilise their country. Friendship with Western and Middle East countries gave them stature, status, and more employment. Bhutto was the right man for them. He was the bold one who talked of waging a continuous war with India with a view to ultimately putting her in a small corner.

Bhutto had supporters in the international forums, some so loyal to him that they saw in India a villain. They argued that Pakistan was too small in size and resources to ever constitute a threat to India, that the Pak bogey was an Indian figment intended to keep Pakistan economically and militarily anaemic, and ultimately absorbed it in India's own sphere of influence, which, they argued, was heavily influenced by the Russians. This reasoning, particularly the linkage with Moscow, draws a strong support for the Pak case from the Western nations even now.

Although there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan, the latter have managed to put across a better image in the Muslim world, and have managed to draw almost instant support to whatever case they put up before any international Muslim forum. India's one disadvantage has been her secular status. After coming into prominence in the early sixties, Mr. Bhutto did a lot of foreign travelling and established some very important and valuable connections. The central theme of his entire activity was to do down India at whatever forum he could. He declared that Pakistan had no enemy but one, that is, India, that Pakistan could not rest content till she had developed the capability to neutralise the aggressive

potential of her enemy. Considering India's superiority in manpower and resources, he came to the conclusion that Pakistan had to possess a nuclear device and hold India at bay with that. It could even be used to blackmail India which had been subjugated by smaller armies invading from the north-west with more modern weapons and better fighting techniques. While at the crest of his popularity, he must have felt like a messiah, the deliverer of Pakistan, and in that state he must have felt the urgency to get to the very top at the earliest, for he was convinced that only he could lead Pakistan to her ultimate glory.

Economically, Pakistan was rather badly off. Per capita income in the western wing was around Rs 450 (which was about the same as the Indian average) while in the eastern wing it was around Rs 300. But a small section of the people, mostly service officers and bureaucrats, or those otherwise powerful - contractors, builders, men of trade, commerce and industry - including the 22 richest families (all from the western wing), lived in great luxury and splendour, enjoying privileges which very few enjoyed even in the rich capitalist countries. Like the leaders in almost all developing countries, Pakistan too had its share of leaders who took the stage from time to time, letting out a lot of rhetoric, finding fault with the government of the day, promising affluence and prosperity to everyone who listened to them, then getting into the government, or becoming a beneficiary of the system, getting rich by hook or by crook, and then getting pulled down by others equally set to get to the position of influence. They spent a lot of time discussing religion, for that was a major binding factor, the other being the hate-India sentiment. To sustain Pakistan both these sentiments had to be pandered to in a big way, for that was the reason for the creation of Pakistan. The result of this was that that country paid little attention to developing an industrial base, and it became dependent upon the outside world for its sustenance. It let itself be used as a military base of sorts by the western powers, particularly the US, and earned military and economic aid for itself, including loans for development. But pan-Islamism and hate-India did not wash with the eastern wing for long, for this segment felt that the Punjabi had unfairly dominated the total situation and had grabbed the entire resources, whatever they were from a basically

agricultural economy. Their main concern was with economy. Their argument was that hatred for India and love for Islam were luxuries which could be indulged in only after the basic requirements of food, shelter and clothing had been met. On the ground the position was that while in the defence services and police West Pakistanis had around 93 per cent of all the jobs, in other departments of the Government, including home, agriculture, industries, the portion of jobs in their custody varied between 75 and 85 per cent. The price of essential items of food in East Pakistan was just double of that in the wester wing. The revenue expenditure in the past 20 years had been around Rs 5,000 crore in the western wing, as against Rs 1,500 crore in the eastern wing. Mujib said that because the Pak capital and the defence headquarters were located in the west, 70 per cent of the federal budget got expended there. He said this had to be rationalised, and the minimum that was required was financial autonomy. He perceived no military threat to East Bengal from any quarter; in any case, the defence headquarters had not deployed any force in their sector for that purpose. Thus Bengal was hardly the beneficiary of whatever share they were carrying in the burden of the defence budget. The beneficiaries were the Punjabis who constituted the bulk of the rank and file of the defence forces. The factories catering to the needs of defence were also located in Punjab, providing employment only to the Punjabis. The Bengali was not in agreement with the Punjabi argument that the key to East Pakistan's defence lay in the west. The Bengali view was that the India spectre was of the Punjabis' own making. Whatever threat India posed could be handled at the diplomatic level, without having to bear the crushing burden of maintaining a large standing army. Kashmir was too far away for them to be of any relevance, more so when the quest for Kashmir was becoming synonymous with hunger and deprivation for the Bengalis.

A section of public opinion in the west was for a dialogue with the east so as to resolve the crisis and save the integrity of Pakistan. In effect, what the east was asking for was a loosely federated Pakistan with each unit exercising autonomy in financial and other connected matters (which meant autonomy in most subjects including defence; the east could disagree on the need for maintaining a large standing military force). This

section felt that rather than talking of different constituent units, there could be two units; that is, East and West Pakistan. If ultimately there had to be a the parting of ways, that would happen after all attempts to keep the country unified had been exhausted, and would happen peacefully, without harming the interests of the citizens on either side, and leaving at least some scope for unity and cooperation in the future.

The hawks in the western wing were not convinced. They were for a showdown no matter what the consequences. The hard core amongst them were of the opinion that the Bengali lacked the quality of sincerity, that their politicians were ever suspicious and ever loquacious and quarrelsome, flaunting law at every step. In fact, they were a thorn, and something had to be done about it. Perhaps the Bengali masses could be converted, but the politicians, tutored by the Indians and supported by the 10 million Bengali Hindus, were another matter! There were no two issues on which the two wings were in agreement, and the feelings were so strong that Mujib ur Rahman, while he was prepared to negotiate with the President, hated even to see Bhutto's face. As for the idea of a loose federation, the hawks were totally against it. In their view it amounted to Pakistan falling apart at the seams.

By the time Ayub handed over the reins of government to his C-in-C, General Yahya Khan, chiefly in repudiation of Bhutto, the latter had already made very meaningful contacts at the highest levels inside and outside the defence services, and a number of senior officers in the top echelons, including Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, were cooperating with him. Yahya was a competent military commander and a straight soldier. He was the commander of the 1965 Chhamb thrust that took the entire political and war machinery of India by surprise. It was a bold move, across a river which should have been unfordable during that part of the year. To halt this thrust India had to open hostilities at a number of other points, but it goes to the credit of the Pakistan Army that they managed to present a facade of strength in this sector even after the Sialkot front had opened and a sizeable number of troops had been withdrawn by them from this area. The aim of opening other fronts by India was to take back its territory which the Pakistanis had occupied in the pre-emptive strike. The

Indians failed to achieve this. Pakistanis pulled off this trick again in 1971, and so demoralised the Indians that they declared the areas of Chhamb and Deva indefensible and handed them over to Pakistan in exchange for territory elsewhere. Refugees from villages in these areas are still rotting in camps around Jammu.

4. The national elections

Yahya's reputation as a military commander in his own country was impeccable. After the 1971 operations, accounts appeared in the Indian papers about his being a drunkard and a womaniser. From what was known of the man the accounts seemed to have been greatly exaggerated. He was no bigger a drunkard than some of his contemporaries on this side of the border. Besides, in some prudish circles in India a view prevails that for success in war spartan discipline is a prerequisite. Discipline is important, no doubt. But political and bureaucratic integrity is equally important. Discipline has to flow naturally from all constituents of a nation. Minor human idiosyncrasies and frailties count for little when compared to gaps caused by corruption, nepotism and injustice.

After taking over Yahya announced that he meant to restore the civilian rule, and, to everyone's surprise, he gave out 5 October 1970, as the day for the national elections. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the Awami League, a liberal party with a secular outlook, was released from jail. He had earlier been put on trial by Ayub in what was called the Agartala Conspiracy Case, but the trial had to be called off on account of the very severe reaction that it generated in East Bengal. The political parties in the two wings now got down to seriously prepare for the polls.

At this stage the eastern wing was in no mood for reconciliation. The downfall of Ayub, the announcement of the election date, were their victories, and they had no intention of giving up the advantage. They said that the per capita income of the western wing had doubled since independence while that of the eastern wing had barely crawled. All the 22 families which owned the bulk of Pakistan's wealth, were from the west. The west, they said, was pillaging the golden Bangla! The western wing

blamed the Bengalis for their poor growth. They called them lazy, inefficient, given to too much talk and too little work. Over an area of 55,000 square miles they had a population of almost 80 million and that hardly left any room for growth. They had almost 12 million Hindus (there were more than 15 million in 1947, before Partition). Would Bengalis not be rich if these 12 million were driven out of the country? They were at the root of all the discontent, anyway!

However, the immediate concern was the elections. The National Assembly was to give a constitution to the country after it had been duly assembled, although this was not to be considered as adopted till presidential assent had been accorded. Bhutto was confident that his Pakistan People's Party had a fairly strong base in East Bengal, that he would be able to secure enough seats - from East Bengal - to be able to form a government at the centre. His supporters had assured him that Bengalis did not consider the Awami League to be a serious threat to him, for they believed little benefit would accrue to their wing by opposing the government, or the western wing. They wanted to cooperate, and the election manifesto issued by the PPP had fairly satisfied them. No doubt there were fanatical Bengalis, led by Maulana Bhashani, who would not be satisfied with anything less than a complete split, but they were in minority. Mujib himself was a moderate, and was once a friend of Bhutto and many a reckonable personality in the west.

Thunderbolt

While all this was going on, in came the monsoons of 1970, bringing in their wake such torrential rains that the entire East Bengal was engulfed by the worst floods in its history. All life came to a standstill, and it was realised that elections on 5 October would not be possible. Consequently the data was shifted to 7 December 1970. After the rains the election activity picked up once again with politicians obstreperously claiming attention, letting out tirades, lies, truths, anything to somehow secure success. Then, suddenly, the country was struck by a bolt from the blue. On the night of 12/13 November, barely a few days before the elections, the southern part of East Bengal was hit by the worst cyclone and tidal bore

of the century, devastating the country with waves as high as 50 feet, leaving 300,000 people dead in its wake. Apart from the havoc it caused, it also brought to the fore, like it had never happened before, the intensity of the hostility the people of the two wings nursed towards each other. Bengalis, forgetting that it was the worst disaster in a century, accused the west for having done little by way of construction of channels and bunds against floods. The Army was called out for help, and there was little they could do except clear the dead bodies, which task they were not very enthusiastic about, saying that Bengalis must clear their own dead and their own debris. The Bengalis felt the Army was totally indifferent to their woes. There were railway tracks to be repaired, water supply to be effected, medical facilities to be provided, marooned people to be rescued. Organisations rushed from other countries to provide succour, while the Punjabi army just hung on in the barracks, playing cards, organising cinema shows, and relaxing. Was this a national army or an army of occupation? What did the Bengalis expect, the army retorted? Dispose of your stinking corpses! Clean up your dwellings! If God had struck the Bengalis with a thunder bolt, how were the Punjabis to blame for this? How about doing a bit of their work themselves?

Elections

Elections were held on 7 December 1970. As far as East Pakistan was concerned, the air was highly charged against the western wing. No one could dare support any party or movement which might have had its base in the west. No one could afford to ignore Mujib or his party without running the risk of having to face serious repercussions against himself or his family. Mujib and the Awami League had fully exploited the situation caused by the cyclone, to their advantage. In the final stages, particularly after the cyclone, he managed to convince the electorate that this was their last chance to free themselves of the stranglehold of the west. There was a very high degree of motivation amongst the members of the Party, its workers, the electorate. The Party ideas had permeated right down to the grass roots. When the results of the election were announced, even the most optimistic assessments made by the eastern wing were belied, and for the western wing a crisis of unfathomable dimensions had precipitated. Out

of the total of 313 seats of the National Assembly, The Awami League had secured 167, losing only two in the eastern wing. These two seats had been left by the League for Paridev Roy, a Chakma leader, and Nurul Amin of the Pakistan Democratic Party. Bhutto's People's Party got only 82 seats. The scales were clearly tilted in favour of the eastern wing. Pakistan was heading straight towards being dominated by the Bengalis. While the Awami League had not won even one seat in the west, the People's or any other Party from the west had drawn a blank in the east. The polarisation between the two wings had been complete.

Now there were only two options before the western wing: honour the elections and let the Bengalis run the government, or not honour the elections and try and restore the status quo ante. If the latter course was adopted there was the possibility of a vertical split. But would the Army not be able to take care of that? The possibility of the split had appeared in 1958 also, and the Army had intervened quite successfully. Perhaps with time some solution would be found. Perhaps the Bengalis would tire out into submission. The prospects must have gladdened the hearts of the military leadership.

President Yahya Khan decided on a kind of go slow course. The National Assembly should have been called immediately after the declaration of the results, but this was not done on the plea that the directions in which the two major parties were pulling were so divergent that it would be impossible to draw a constitution of consensus. Negotiations were, therefore, started between the President and the leaders of the two principal parties, to work out the modalities for the meeting and working of the Assembly.

Mujib's Six Points

Mujib had fought the elections on a six-point programme. Briefly the points were as follows:

(a) There shall be a federal government at the centre. Elections to the federal legislature and the legislatures of the federating units shall be direct, and on the basis of universal adult franchise.

(b) Federal government shall be responsible for defence and foregin affairs only. All other functions shall be taken care of by the federating units themselves.

(c) There shall be separate currencies, or single currency but completely controlled by the regional reserve banks.

(d) Federating units shall provide money to the federal government for its functioning on the basis of a predetermined procedure.

(e) Federating units shall maintain their own foreign exchange accounts, and make foreign exchange available to the federal government on the basis of a predetermined procedure.

(f) Federating units can raise their own militias and para military forces as necessary, for national security.

These points were first given by Mujib at the All Pakistan National Conference in February 1966, at Lahore, almost immediately after the Tashkent Agreement between India and Pakistan. In January 1968 Mujib, along with 34 others, including some civil and military officials, was arrested in connection with the Agartala Conspiracy Case, and put on trial on 19 June 1968. The alleged aim of the conspiracy was to capture a part of East Bengal and set up an independent government. Apparently the flag and the national anthem of Bangla Desh are the same as had been adopted by the 'conspirators'. However, the furore against the trial was so loud that the politicians in both wings forced the President to repeal the ordinance under which the trial had been ordered. In the meantime, in the eastern wing 'people's courts' had been set up and some executions of government 'loyalists' took place. On 10 March 1969 the President called a conference of leaders of political parties, but the air was so charged with regionalism that the conference broke up in confusion after four days of meetings. On 25 March Yahya became the President, and he reimposed the Martial Law.

Apart from the politicians, the 22 wealthiest families of Pakistan also played their part. They had

interests in East Pakistan and were totally opposed to the mavericks obtaining there. With the money power at their disposal, they made sure nothing ever went through which even remotely could harm their interests. People obsessed with power and money can be very self-centred. Even national interests are of secondary importance for them.

Yahya proved to be true to his word, and from January 1970 permitted full political activity. The politicians of the western wing complained about the way the Awami League was operating. It was pointed out to him that the six-point formula was in conflict with the Leagal Framework Order issued by his Government on 30 March 1970 which was to be the basis for the proposed national constitution. The six-point programme visualised the federating units to be autonomous, whereas the Legal Frame Work Order provided for only limited autonomy. Nothing was done, as nothing could be done. Yahya appeared to be reluctant to take on the Awami League frontally - they had caused the ouster of his predecessor, Ayub! Besides, with the politicians in both the wings committed to ending the military rule, and a powerful military lobby supporting Bhutto, and the two major political parties bent upon implementing their manifestoes with unbending fanatical zeal, there was indeed nothing that could be done in a hurry.

Under the command of Colonel M.A.G. Osmani the Awami League set up a military wing thus giving credence to the charges contained in the Conspiracy Case. It was called the Sevak Vahin and was recruited basically from the youth of colleges and schools. Military wings were being organised by other parties also but on a much smaller scale. The Awami League did appear to have the idea of snatching power by force, if required.

Yahya

Yahya Khan was born in 1917 and educated at the Punjab university and IMA Dehra Dun. In service he distinguished himself and was chief of army general staff during 1957-62, general officer commanding East Pakistan during 1962-64, and was commanding the division that caught India off balance during the 1965 war. He was elevated to the rank of the commander-in-chief of the army in 1966 and became the President of Pakistan in 1969.

It was alleged that gradually Yahya got surrounded by a coterie of yes-men and sycophants, and gradually his contact with reality was dimmed. He was operating through a small circle of officials who had won his confidence, the chief amongst whom were General Abdul Hamid Khan, Chief of Staff Army who, it was alleged, more than ably represented the interests of some of the 22 wealthiest families, and Lieutenant General S.G.M.Peerzada, Yahya's principal staff officer at the Headquarters Chief Martial Law Administrator, the highest governing element in the government of the country.

Nevertheless Yahya showed a good sense in taking decisions, and his command decisions were generally well deliberated upon and sound. He had been thrown in a rotten situation, which had come into being the day Pakistan with its two wings, was born; it was a totally unnatural alliance. It may indeed have been part I of the Bengali plan, part II of which was securing for themselves a sovereign, independent Bangla Desh, as the Punjabis alleged. But Yahya faced the situation with tact and intelligence, and made a damn good try to keep the eastern wing within Pakistan. His only hope lay in somehow getting around Mujib and getting him to see reason. He tried that. Next he tried to divide the Bengalis. He secretly, sometimes even overtly, encouraged the Muslim League (there were three of them), Jamat-i-Islami, National Awami Party of Maulana Bhashani, and a host of smaller fry, so that they might blunt the edge of the Awami League movement. He paid them money. He provided them with Government patronage. He had, perhaps, achieved a measure of success too. But the cyclone of 12/13 November destroyed everything; he had not realised this till the election results were out. The election results gave the Bengalis an overwhelming majority. The implication of this was that the constitution would have had to be framed under Mujib's six points which would have meant a virtual dismemberment of Pakistan. This could not be permitted. So the only course open was to hold on to the military rule and restore the law and order, if necessary by force. Could Yahya have acted when it was pointed out to him that the six points were in conflict with the Legal Framework Order? If he had, he would have precipitated the same situation. At that time there was still hope, political parties were operating, the cyclone had not struck. He had to give the problem and the people who were trying to resolve it, a fair chance.

Escalation of the conflict

Nothing happened during the month of December except that Yahya held detailed consultations with west wing leaders and attempts were made to get around Mujib so that he might radically alter the six points, which he obviously could not after having won the elections on their basis. The alternative of a Mujib-Bhutto coalition with Yahya as president, was put across to him, but he turned it down. The attitude of the Awami League had hardened because the National Assembly had not been called soon after the election results were announced. On 3 January 1971, at a mammoth public meeting at the Paltan Maidan at Dacca, Mujib put all Awami League members of the provincial and national assemblies on oath to follow the party directives and programmes. Even in the Army the Bengalis were showing restiveness. Bhutto visited Dacca on 27 January 1971 but found the Bengalis totally unyielding. The President invited Mujib for talks at Rawalpindi, to be held on 9 and then on 17 February. On both occasions the invitations were turned down. Mujib just did not visit West Pakistan after the elections. He was prepared to go there only to attend the Assembly session, and that too along with all the elected members. Where was the question of negotiations at that stage?

The situation was rapidly moving to a point of no return, and the Government reached the conclusion that use of force could not be ruled out if the east wing had to be held within Pakistan: A few thousand individuals dead was not too high a price for keeping the country united. Admiral S.M. Ahsan, the Governor of East Bengal, and Sahibsada M.Yaqub Khan, the Lieutenant General Commanding Eastern Command and the Martial Law Administrator, were against stern military action. They advised that election promises should be honoured. But how?

On 28 February 1971 the Governor informed Mujib of the President's decision to postpone the Assembly Session due at Dacca - since the Bengalis were in majority - from 3 March 1971. This was apparently done on Bhutto's advice without consulting Mujib. At that time more than two-thirds of the members, including 36 from West Pakistan, were present at Dacca. Mujib said a short postponement could be accommodated as long as fresh date was given for

the meeting of the Assembly. Otherwise, he said, the electorate would not accept it. The Government announcement came on the radio on 1 March at 1.05 P.M. and it created a tremendous uproar in East Pakistan. Within minutes all work ceased and a mammoth crowd led by students, headed for Hotel Purbani where Mujib was holding a meeting with his Members of the National Assembly. At a hurriedly called press conference he said that because of the negative stand taken by the minority party (the PPP), the Government brought to a halt the democratic process of making the constitution. He gave a plan for the next six days or so and said that March 2 and 3 would be observed as complete Hartals. Later, in the afternoon, looting of West Pakistani business establishments on Jinnah Avenue took place, and this was followed by looting of residential houses in Nawabpur. In the firing by the Army, for restoring law and order, a number of people were killed.

5. The revolt

That night the Governor was relieved of his responsibilities and Sahibzada Yaqub Khan was asked to take over the duties, in addition to his duties as Martial Law Administrator.

Trouble spread to other areas inside and outside Dacca. From 2 to 6 March complete hartal was ordered by Mujib, and no government, semi-government or private agency dared to function. The rioting became widespread. The Governor and his advisors - their morale in their boots - felt 'Plan Blitz' which had been designed to crush with the full weight of the Army, any revolt or rebellion, would not serve the desired purpose, basically because the Army strength to meet the situation was considered to be inadequate. A request was made to the President on 4 March to come down to Dacca and try and resolve the issues involved through negotiations. The President consented, then changed his mind. The Governor and his aides felt the President was not being advised correctly. Therefore, on the might of 4 March Major General Rao Farman Ali, Martial Law Advisor to the Governor, was despatched to Rawalpindi with a detailed brief. While the Advisor was still at Rawalpindi, on 5 March the Governor informed Yahya that he had lost control over the situation, and offered to resign. He was told to hold on till his relief was appointed. The Governor put in his papers formally on 6 March, and on the afternoon of 7 March Lieutenant General Tikka Khan arrived to take charge from him. The President also announced 25 March as the date for the meeting of the National Assembly.

General Tikka was a Punjabi, a known Bhutto loyalist, and had the reputation of being hard-handed; he had the dubious distinction of being called the Butcher of Baluchistan. His appointment amounted to Bhutto virtually threatening the Bengalis with dire consequences if they

did not come round to his way, and was widely and highly resented. In a hard-hitting rejoinder to this appointment, coinciding with Tikka's arrival, Mujib addressed a mammoth meeting at the Ramna Race Course which was attended by over a million people, and where he stopped just short of declaring complete independence. The great mass of people assembled there were in fact looking forward to that declaration, so provoked were they at that stage, but Mujib refused to be swept by the emotional wave and went by the decisions arrived at earlier and the plans that might have been drawn on the basis of those decisions. A direct confrontation with the Army was to be avoided, possibly till the right moment had arrived. The movement had to flower on an agitational approach, in non-cooperation, in guerilla warfare which would make the stay of all west Pakistanis in the east wing, a danger to their lives and property, and make the task of cooperation by Bengalis or Biharis with them equally dangerous, if not altogether impossible.

Mujib, however, laid down four conditions for participating in the National Assembly session: (a) withdraw martial Law, (b) return troops to the barracks, (c) hold an enquiry into the killings, and (d) transfer power to the elected representatives. In a statement issued later in the day he added four more points to his earlier four; viz, (e) stop military build-up and flow of troops from the west, (f) stop firing on civilians, (g) stop interference by military in Government affairs, (h) give law and order responsibility exclusively to the police and the Bengali East Pakistan Rifles assisted, where necessary, by Awami League volunteers. To force the Government to accede to the demands, a 10-point programme was announced. The points were: (a) No tax payments, (b) complete hartal in all government, semi-government and private establishments; announcement of appropriate exemptions from time to time, (c) functioning of railways/ports as long as no defence materials were transported, (d) Correct accounts of statements and happenings in radio, television, newspapers and no censorship, (e) functioning of only the local and inter-district telephones (f) closure of all educational institutions (g) no remittances to the west wing by banks or the Reserve Bank, (h) black flags hoisted on all buildings, (i) hartals withdrawn and reimposed from time

to time depending upon the situation, (j) sangram parishads organised at all levels, right down to the streets and villages.

The Chief Justice, or any other judge, refused to administer the oath of office to the newly-appointed Governor, and ultimately the Chief Justice of Pakistan had to be rushed from the west to Dacca for this purpose. The entire administration was taking orders from the Awami League, and no meeting could be arranged between Mujib and Tikka.

The Bengalis Flare Up

An organised campaign was set in motion by the Awami League for the vilification of the Army. Vehicles carrying troops, rations and stores were stopped at barricades, and often there was firing. By word of mouth and through newspapers and pamphlets, the information travelled, and often, as it happens in such situations, the stories were greatly exaggerated and laced up with a lot of sensationalism. As a result, between 7 March, when Mujib delivered the Ramna Race Course address, and 26 March, when the Army crackdown began, Bengalis, loaded with solid hatred against the West Pakistanis, not only did not cooperate with the Government and took orders directly from the Awami League, but also resorted to violence in which many non-Bengalis lost their lives, and their women got raped and properties destroyed. From 1 March to 26 March Mujib was the de facto ruler of East Pakistan, and the non-Bengalis were scared out of their wits and wanted to run to the west. The worst blow fell on the Biharis, who had migrated to East Pakistan in the wake of the 1947 riots, but had not been assimilated in the Bengali stream on account of the somewhat insular attitude of the Bengalis, and who, therefore, had served as a strong prop for the West Pakistani domination of the eastern wing. By west wing estimates at least 100,000 people were affected by the Bengali wrath in those days in terms of numbers killed, wounded, raped and those whose property was destroyed. The figure could be an exaggeration, but was believed by one and all who belonged to West Pakistan, whether residing in one wing or the other. Tales of horrendous atrocities were in circulation along with stories of magnificent resistance put up against heavy

odds. The people in the west were horrified, angry, and the contempt in which they had all along held the Bengali, surfaced with ten-fold magnification, and a cry for revenge went up from almost all quarters, though it was the loudest from the Punjabis. The Bengali community in the west was sequestered, as were the Bengali officers including service officers, and Bengali regiments and other personnel in the armed forces wre ordered to the barracks and all but disarmed. The first battalion of the EBR (East Bengal Regiment) who had returned from exercises on 29 March were ordered to be disarmed on 30 March. There was resistance and as a result some 10 to 12 soldiers of the battalion and a few personnel of the East Pakistan Rifles got killed.

The fruits of revolts, the successful ones that is, and revolutions, are seldom enjoyed by their authors. In most cases the revolutions eat them up. Revolutions are a kind of a free-for-all. The process generates numerous force centres, and the force centre with maximum power ultimately emerges the winner and lays down the law. In 1947 Jinnah could not have visualised what the Punjabi Muslim in West Pakistan did to his Hindu and Sikh compatriots. He and his ilk were a fading phenomenon even before Pakistan was formed. Likewise, in the early months of 1971, it was the Yahya-Bhutto-Mujib triangle which was directing the affairs, but following upon their heels, unnoticed by them, there were others, out to convert the nebulous situation to their advantage: the rich business with an insatiable hunger for money, wanting government contracts for war-like items; the ordinary merchants wanting the merchants in the other wing to go so that they might snatch their business; the mosque man steeped in self-aggrandisement letting out aggressive fundamentalist chorus so that he might earn the treatment of a god-head and not be penalised for his incapability to cope with the modern technical and scientific world. The result of the pulls and tugs of the various force centres was the totally uncompromising attitude of the two major political parties, the PPP and the Awami League, with Yahya performing the balancing act basically to ensure his position as the President and perpetuate the military rule to whatever extent possible.

Indian Fokker-friendship blown up

Around this time the people whose interests lay in the perpetuation of disturbed condition-and there were not a few who wanted this - those who wanted the election results put in the garbage can, or those who expected financial gains from a war-like situation (and these included foreign interests as well), and such people - escalated the tension by a couple of notches. Firstly, they organised the hijacking of a Fokker Friendship of Indian Airlines on 29 January 1971, by diverting the flight from Srinagar to Lahore, where, although the passengers were released, the plane was blown up. The Pakistan Government refused to hand over the hijackers to India, and, in order to provoke her, meted a treatment to them befitting heroes. This so incensed India that she forbade all Pakistani air flights over Indian territory. Secondly, they hatched a scheme for driving out the entire Hindu population from East Pakistan into India, by committing mass genocide. It is not clear whether Yahya or Bhutto was involved in this scheme of things, but if they were not, then they appear to have become totally helpless against the real force and, thus, naturally, had lost any claims to leadership. The sinister hand, deftly gloved, moved with power and precision which was totally unmatched by whatever forces of restraint there were, and which might still have been operative then in West Pakistan.

Political Turmoil

Yahya was the President. He had to back the forces of restraint and establish law and order. He wanted time to reinforce the Punjabi Army units in the eastern wing. He wanted to act in a manner as would satisfy the genuine aspirations of the two major political parties, and yet maintain the integrity of his country, although under the democratic process that he had put in motion, he had to do the business of framing the Constitution. But it was not such a simple situation. The two wings were hostilely poised against one another. The situation needed deft handling, otherwise there was the danger of the constituent units of the western wing asking for their independence too. Yahya believed that a loosely-federated Pakistan was a strong possibility, and he had clearly indicated this in his pre-and post-election utterances.

He, perhaps, had not appreciated that such an arrangement would result in a weak Pakistan, and would, perhaps, be the first step towards the ultimate disintegration of Pakistan.

The President's visit to East Pakistan was long overdue, but he had been postponing it. On a couple of occasions even the dates of his intended departure were announced. Once he went as far as Karachi, but then turned back. Possibly the President did not want to go on the visit unless some tangible results were likely to come out of it, and that could happen only if Mujib gave some indications to this effect. At long last the visit came about and the President arrived at the Dacca airport on the afternoon of 15 March 1971, received only by the army brass; East Pakistan police had refused to provide protection to him without the permission of the Awami League. The meeting with Mujib took place on 16 March, and after the meeting the President expressed the opinion that only the strong hand of the Government would make Mujib see reason, and asked Tikka to prepare the plan to deal with the situation.

At this juncture East Pakistan had only one infantry division - 14 Infantry Division - of four brigades; these brigades had a total of 12 infantry battalions of West Pakistanis and six mixed infantry battalions.

Additional troops were as follows:

Mixed armed regiment - one
comprising East and West Pakistanis.

Mixed National Service Battalion - one
Mixed Commando Battalion - one
Mixed Field Regiments Artillery - five
Mixed Light Anti Aircraft Regiment - one
Mixed Mortar Batteries - two
East Pakistan Rifles - 16 wings, having around 13,000 troops, all Bengalis except for a few officers and junior commisioned officers.

The parleys continued and side by side a major plan for the induction of troops by air from West Pakistan was put into operation. All flights touched down at Colombo as Pakistani flights over India were forbidden. In order to maintain secrecy all troops travelled in civilian clothes. Heavy war items, including arms and ammunition, moved by sea.

During the parleys, parties like the Muslim League, Jamat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam, National Awami Party (Wali Group), tried to prevail upon Mujib to resile but to no effect. Mujib knew of the movement of the Army units from the west and was very disturbed about it. March 23 was observed as Resistance Day instead of Republic Day in response to a call given by the Awami League. Pakistani flags were burnt, and Bangla Desh flags were hoisted from all government and non-government buildings, except the Martial Law Headquarters and Headquarters Eastern Command. On 24 March the President ordered Tikka to put into effect the plan to restore the authority of the Government. The President had made up his mind to leave during the night of 25 March and address the nation on 26 March from Rawalpindi. He wanted the action to start after his address. Tikka, however, felt that there were a large number of military personnel in the eastern wing - in Chittagong area they were in a majority - and the address of the President would forewarn them, and their subjugation thereafter would become that much more difficult. He advised that action should start immediately after the departure of the President, in order to achieve total surprise. The recommendation was accepted and the H-hour was fixed as 0100 hours on 26 March 1971.

On 24 and 25 March Dacca was acutely tense, and even though the entire planning for the military action had been carried out in extreme secrecy, it appears the existence of the plan for Operation Searchlight - that was the code name given to the plan - and the orders issued for its execution, were known to the Bengalis. The President left at 7.30 PM, and though the departure was meant to be kept secret, people identified his plane as it appeared over the Dacca sky for a few minutes after take-off. Mujib told his partymen that an agreement had been reached between him and the President and that the President would

make an announcement of it after his arrival at Rawalpindi. But the Bengalis did not believe him and waited in fear and apprehension. The West Pakistan Army waited for the zero hour.

The other leaders who had arrived at Dacca to take part in the negotiations were Wali Khan, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, Qayyum Khan, Maulana Mufti Mahmud of Jamat-ul-Ulema-i-Islami, and, of course, Bhutto. Bhutto was taken around Dacca on 26 March and then put in the plane for Karachi, where on arrival he said that because of the strict measures adopted by the Army, Pakistan had been saved.

The tasks given to the West Pakistan Army were:

(a) disarming of all Bengali armed forces and para military personnel, including personnel of the East Pakistan Rifles and the police;
(b) controlling of all air fields;
(c) securing Chittagong Naval Base;
(d) ensuring security of all towns, particularly cantonments.

In appreciation of the situation that had been carried out by the West Pkistanis, including the advisor to the Governor, Rao Farman Ali, it had been concluded that the basic leadership to the revolting Bengalis was being provided by:

(a) the intellectuals including lawyers, engineers, doctors, professors;
(b) the students;
(c) the Hindus who, as in 1905, had never reconciled to the partition of Bengal.

OPERATION SEARCHLIGHT

The action started at the appointed hour, and within a short time hundreds of people, men, women and children, school-going boys and girls, innocent bystanders, non-violent protestors, people assembled together just by chance, were riddled with Pakistani bullets and lay dead and dying. It is difficult to say how many people died in the genocide, which finally ceased only after the formation of Bangla Desh, but there are varying estimates.

The figure commonly given by the Bengalis when we got to Dacca was one million. Mujib, while addressing Qadir Bahini at Tangail at the arms surrender ceremony on 23 January 1972, quoted the figure of 3 million. The estimates given by fairly sober Pakistani officers varied between 50,000 to 100,000. Whatever the number, the action shook East Bengal right down to the roots. The West Pakistanis killed and raped with impunity and burnt with abandon. When we went in, there were any number of stories of Pakistani officers and men having raped in public, in full view, while guards stood around with automatic weapons trained, ready to shoot down anyone who dared to raise his voice or tried to intercede. The accusations were basically against the Punjabis, and the Bihari Muslims were blamed for being their closest collborators. Hundreds of thousands of people fled to India, the bulk of them being Hindus who were the victims of not only the Punjabi armymen, but also of the Bihari and some Bengali Muslims, of the last category partly because of the religious fanaticism and partly greed for their land and property. Punjabis and Biharis let out vitriolic anti-Hindu tirades. The radio, television, mosques, spoke anti-India and anti-Hindu. Those of the Muslims who believed in 'Joi Bangla' were not affected by this. But there were quite a few who did not care either way. What was important to them was survival; most of them could not afford to take a chance with that. But it must be said of the Bengali that in the face of the worst provocation or inducement, when compared to the Punjabi, he retained much of his sense of compassion and humanity. By December 1971 8 million Hindus had been evicted; there were hardly any left behind. Two million Muslims had also migrated to the refugee camps in India.

Mujibur Rahman was arrested at 1.30 AM on 26 March, within half an hour of the start of the operation. The rest of his party had gone underground. A few barricades had been erected by his supporters around his house, and some resistance was offered. But it was overcome quickly. Later, when asked why he hung on at his residence when every other person of consequence in his party had gone underground, he said the wanted to save Pakistan. He did not want an independent, sovereign Bangla Desh. What he wanted was the acceptance of his six-point formula. He was not for dismemberment. He wanted the union of two

territories, separated by 1200 miles of India and having widely different ethnic and cultural back-grounds, rationalised. But, unfortunately for him, the west wing just did not understand him. Or perhaps they did not want to understand him, for there were too many overly ambitious forces at play there, too many force centres in quest of power. When Yahya arrived at Dacca on 15 December he was confident that he would be able to get Mujib to agree to a solution which would satisfy both the wings. Perhaps in the process, he had hoped perpetuate his presidency. The talk was that he arrived there only after he had received the green signal from East Pakistan. Imagine his consternation when on 16 December, during their first meeting, at which no aides were present, Mujib said he was not budging from the six points. The President exploded in rage, and called him names; Mujib exploded too, and their shouting could be heard by everyone present in the rooms around. Yahya said Mujib failed to understand that his six points were a death warrant for Pakistan. Mujib said there could be no natural union of the two wings, that only a loose federation on the basis of the six points could save the integrity of the country. Yahya was furious, and immediately after the meeting he summoned Tikka and ordered him to prepare plans to restore government authority and teach a lesson to those damned 'machhars' (mosquitoes). However, a couple of days later he was out of the huff, or almost out of it, and told Tikka to relax on his plans, as an acceptable formula on the basis of a federated Pakistan was fairly on the anvil; the formula visualised plenty of autonomy for East Bengal. A couple of days later, however, they were back to square one, and the emergency plan was once again ordered to be finalised.

Mujib was a committed Pakistani. Contrary to the talk in some West Pakistani circles, he was the last man to have even thought of putting East Bengal in India. Only a few days before his arrest he had told an American official: 'We remember too well the tyranny exercised over us when Bengal was united and Hindu zamindars held us like serfs. We will never go back to those Bengali Hindus!' He spurned the offer of militant students and Bengalis in the defence services to participate fully in the movement should he declare independence. He was under great pressure to declare independence, during the 7 March address at the Ramna Race Course, but he resisted the pressure. His

followers were disappointed, for they believed that the point of no return had already been reached in the east-west relations. Mujib believed that there was a solution, that it was possible to hammer out an agreement. But he failed, and when accosted on 25 March after the departure of the President, still said, basically perhaps to pacify his followers, that an agreement had been reached and that the President would announce it from Rawalpindi, after his arrival there. It is possible that, in the interest of security and secrecy, the President had given him some kind of false assurance. It was around 8 PM that a well-wisher of theirs informed them that the Army was about to strike, and soon thereafter the entire movement went underground. It is not clear how Mujib was beguiled into thinking that the President would make a statement on the agreement reached after arrival at Rawalpindi, for even the man in the street knew that no agreement had been reached and none was possible. Mujib was for autonomy for the constituent units. He wanted East Pakistan to be called Bangla Desh which would have its own currency, flag, constitution, finance and defence services of sorts. Tagore's 'Sonar Bangla' was to be the National Anthem. Only the minimum number of subjects were to be handled by the federal centre, including defence at the national level. Bhutto, who had emerged as the West Pakistani people's leader, and Yahya, had come to the conclusion that the Awami League raised fresh demands every time they were called to the negotiating table, i.e. they escalated their demands, and that with the proposed Bangla constitution coming in, Pakistan would certainly break up. Mujib and his followers did not agree with this. It appears that Mujib was also working for an independent Bangla Desh, but he was doing it in a manner that would cause the least hurt to the Bengalis. Then why did he stay back when all his partymen had gone underground? Perhaps he still hoped to save the situation from turning into a bloody affair.

So Mujib waited, and they arrested him, and after a detention of a week or so under station commander, Dacca, he was moved out to West Pakistan. Thus the curtain was rung down upon the first act of the drama. The politicians were out; they had failed to arrive at a political solution. The military was in. The problem was now to be sorted out militarily.

6. The crackdown

Dacca was subjugated within a couple of hours of the launching of Operation Searchlight except for the Bangla Police who put up a stiff resistance and were wiped out virtually to a man. The extermination carried out at the University was more systematic. Even the girls were not spared. The Army said it found a large number of weapons with Indian markings, and caught a number of non-Bengali young girls who were serving as prostitutes for the people fighting against them. That was the depth to which the Pakistani propaganda machine had sunk!

The swift action of the Army did immobilise the Awami Party movement. The party had no leader left, and the public, therefore, stood in abject confusion, and this put heart in the Armymen and they went about their job with fiendish vigour. No news was permitted to leak out of the country, or even travel between different sectors which had been effectively isolated. Foreign newsmen were thrown out and telephone exchanges disconnected. The Army moved to pre-selected targets, killing, plundering, burning, destroying. They had been given verbal instructions through couriers who travelled to various contonments on 24 and 25 March. People resisted, helped by the police and the para military personnel of East Pakistan Rifles. There was stiff fighting in Jessore on 30 March, and in Dinajpur, and in other major towns. In Comilla the briefing was done personally by the General Officer Commanding 14 Infantry Division, Major General Khadim Raja. In this sector 4 East Bengal Rifles had mutinied. They had killed some of their West Pakistani officers and had fairly overpowered the men who were loyal to Pakistan.

Chittagong

Chittagong had turned into a major resistance centre. Brigadier Mozumdar, who was commanding this sector, was

considered a fanatical Bengali by the Pakistanis. He was taken to Dacca on 24 March by Major General Khadim Raja, on the pretext that he was required at Joydebpur to give a pep talk to the 2 EBR Battalion, who, it was given out, were showing signs of restiveness. Once in Dacca he was effectively clamped and not allowed to make any trouble in collusion with Bengali militarymen. Chittagong had a cadet college at Faujdarhat, about 20 kilometres to the north, the East Bengal Regimental Centre where 9 EBR was being raised, and the 8 EBR, a regular and well-trained battalion. Besides, it had the naval base, and the air field. 53 Infantry Brigade had been given the responsibility to first secure Comilla and then Chittagong. The Brigade secured the first objective without any difficulty. 4 EBR, however, stayed unmolested at Brahmanbaria, opposite Agartala, and later took up defences astride the rail bridge on the Meghna at Bhairab Bazar, and had to be dislodged by the West Pakistanis by mounting a full-fledged brigade attack in which artillery, air force and the naval gun-boats also took part. The only other brigade-level attack was put in to capture Goalundo Ghat on river Padma. Otherwise all other actions against the Bengalis were restricted to company or battalion-level engagements.

53 Infantry Brigade ordered a column against Chittagong, based on 24 Battalion, the Frontier Force Regimet (24 FF). The column started the advance at midnight 25/26 March, and came across no serious opposition except for a number of demolished bridges and culverts, till it reached Faujdarhat. In the meantime, Major Ziaur Rahman, the second-in-command of 8 EBR, had mutinied and his men had killed their West Pakistani commanding officer. On 27 March 1971 Zia proclaimed, on Chittagong radio, the formation of independent, sovereign Bangla Desh with Mujib as its President. He also announced the structure of the government of the new country, saying that it was in keeping with how Mujib had wanted his government organised.

There was a stiff fight in which both sides suffered heavy casualties. Fortunately for the Pakistanis, the Naval Base and the air field had been secured by the Navy earlier. Some troops recently arrived by sea, came in as handy reinforcements. Simultaneously with 24 FF, 20

Baluch had also been advancing on Chittagong. The Bengalis opposing them were 8 and 9 EBR, the trained personnel (around 1300) of the East Bengal Regimental Centre, the entire personnel of the East Pakistan Rifles in the area, and the entire Bengali police in the area. After the radio broadcast by Zia, all EB battalions, the EPR and the police revolted all over East Bengal. In addition, weapons and ammunition kept at the various police headquarters for distribution to the government para military elements, were distributed to militant students and young and old Bengalis who subsequently became the base for the Mukti Bahini.

9 and 16 Infantry Divisions

9 Infantry Division was airlifted to East Pakistan, minus its heavy equipment, between 1 and 4 April, and was ordered to clear the entire eastern sector, east of the Meghna, from Sylhet to Chittagong. 27 Infantry Brigade of this Division was given to 14 Infantry Division for clearing Mymensingh, while 313 Brigade was allotted to Sylhet and 53 Brigade to Chittagong. Immediately following the 9 Division was the arrival of 16 Infantry Division who were allotted to the northern part of the country, the area between the Ganga (Padma) and the Brahmaputra (Jamuna). By 10 April the Army had secured the initial grip over the country, and by the end of the month the grip was fairly firm almost right upto the borders, except in the Belonia Bulge area where ERR under majors Zia and Khalid Musharaff held out, after Chittagong had been captured by the Army on 12 April and the ERR and the other troops had retreated to the Chittagong Hill Tract and thence to Belonia. A well-fought engagement between the Army and the Bengalis took place during 18 and 19 April, and the Bengalis withdrew ultimately to Mymensingh and Sylhet area, where a brigade with supporting arms and services was raised out of the EBR and other troops. During the clearing of Dacca and Chittagong alone, according to Bengali sources, some 50,000 Bengalis lost their lives. By 10 May, the Army claimed that the whole of East Pakistan had been brought under control.

The East Pakistan Civil Armed Force (EPCAF) was raised by the Government to replace the EPR which had revolted. Hardly one or two out of the 16 wings of EPR had remained

loyal, and hardly 1500 men (Biharis) were available to raise the EPCAF. To begin with 50 per cent of its 13,000 personnel were from the west, but later their strength went up to 8,500 which included reservists and pensioners. The personnel from East Pakistan, around 4,500, were mostly Biharis. This force was under Major General M. Jamshed, ex-Director General of EPR. Recruitment for Mujahids and Police (mainly non-Bengalis) was also started, as also for Razakars (mostly Bengalis). The function of the latter was mostly to provide information regarding the intentions and movements of militant Bengalis and provide protection to police stations and other government installations in the interior. Officially, Operation Searchlight was over by the end of May. The organisation of the Martial Law Administration was somewhat on the lines given below:

Lieutenant General	A.A.K.Niazi	- Martial Law Administrator
Major Generals	Rao Farman Ali	- Political Affairs
	Rahim	- Civil Affairs
	Jamshed	- Director General EPCAF and Deputy Martial Law Administrator

All the three major generals worked under Niazi and were answerable to him; Niazi had taken over the functions of the Commander Eastern Command from Tikka on 11 April thereby releasing the latter to concentrate solely on the job of Governor.

The Bengalis were on the run. They were neither ready for, nor had they visualised the ferocity of the West Pakistan Army. Within weeks, because of the near total disruption of the transport system, food movement was adversely affected. In some places people starved. The daily transport requirement of food and other essential items was around 5,000 tons. Industry, trade and commerce came to a virtual standstill. Because of the lack of inputs crop prospects dwindled. People were out of jobs. They had, no doubt, revolted in one voice, because they had thought that the time was ripe for revolt, but they had dreamed of 'sonar Bangla' after a short fight. Instead they found death, destruction, humiliation, pain. The

people faltered. The movement rapidly started losing its momentum. A kind of sullenness, a lack of belief in what the leaders were saying, became manifest in the attitude.

India was affected adversely by this revolution of the Bengalis, whose capacity to fight to the finish was, at best, doubtful. There were millions upon millions of refugees; 8 million by the end of August, 10 million by the end of October. The chances were that, in course of time, a larger number still would trudge down in search of food, shelter, work. Their presence imposed severe social and financial burdens upon India.

India told Pakistan to create conditions immediately for the return of the refugees. The best way was to accept Mujib's six points, draw up a constitution and bring in a democratic form of government. The refugees would not risk a return as long as the country was under the military dictatorship. In a country comprising people of such diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social backgrounds as the West and East Pakistanis, no government other than a government by consensus, was possible. But West Pakistanis felt that the Mujib formula would disintegrate the country. According to them West Pakistan was a viable unit and they must not do anything which might jeopardise the unity of its constituent units, even if it meant the eastern wing getting out of Pakistan and becoming independent.

The Pakistan Government said India was exaggerating the refugee problem. In fact, they said, movement of population between East and West Bengal, and between East Bengal and Assam, had been a continuous process in the past. When they were told that the current influx had necessitated establishment of hundreds of refugee camps, they said that only 400,000 Biharis had emigrated under the pressure of the militant Bengalis, that, in any case they originally belonged to India and had come to East Bengal only when pushed out by the Hindus during the 1947 riots, that once the militant Bengalis relented and the Government succeeded in establishing law and order, they would return. India took teams of international observers around the camps, who confirmed the figures given out by India, but the Pakistanis said that the observers had been shown fake camps, filled with Indian Bengalis. There were

countries who believed Pakistan's blatant lies even in the face of contrary evidence. The US Government gave the impression that it did not entirely disbelieve the Pakistanis, even after Senator Edward Kennedy had made a visit and issued a statement regarding the magnitude of the problem, or Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan had given out his assessment. China also supported the Pakistani claims, as also some Arab governments. It was a provocative situation that could be sorted out only by waging war against Pakistan.

In the Indian defence strategy no large-scale warfare had been visualised in the east, with East Pakistan or with Burma. Even for war with China, India had been caught on the wrong foot. In 1971 whatever forces were there in the eastern theatre were for internal security, or the protection of India's northern borders against Chinese incursion. Against East Pakistan, the need for protecting the Siliguri Corridor and Calcutta had been accepted; protection of Calcutta was to be secured by launching an attack on Jessore. In the event there were around three divisions and one para brigade in West Bengal on internal security duties, and one division each in Nagaland and Mizoram performing the same functions. But the formations were fairly involved in the tasks assigned to them, and they were without their normal support weapons and were, thus, not fit for serious warfare, although the weapons could be moved up at short notice.

By 4 April 1971 Pak 9 Infantry Division had arrived in East Pakistan, and within 10 days thereafter 16 Infantry Division was also in. Already within East Pakistan there was the 14 Infantry Division comprising four infantry brigades. In addition there were the paramilitary forces like the EPR, later converted to EPCAF, Mujahids, Razakars and the like. While groaning under the pressure of refugees and seeing no end to the constantly flowing chain of human beings, some elements in the Government of India strongly advised immediate war and, thus, forcing Pakistan to create conditions for the return of the refugees. It was argued that though the Pakistanis had 13 or 14 brigades, they were badly embroiled with the Bengalis in restoring law and order. India's Border Security Force (BSF) personnel who had gone inside East Bengal, had found large areas operating virtually

independent of any government control, and the people generally well disposed to the idea of an Indian invasion for forcing Pakistan to create conditions for the return of the refugees. The situation encouraged taking a risk and liberating a part or whole of East Bengal and establishing a caretaker government.

But there were other factors. A declaration of war could have cost India the sympathy of a large number of nations. India, to keep to the code of international ethics and practices, could not have walked into another country, by accusing it of one crime or another, without giving the defaulting country adequate opportunity to right the wrong, for the act of waging war is committed only after all other methods of sorting out the contentious issues have been exhausted. As a developing country India depends significantly on the fiscal aid and the technical know-how provided by the developed countries, a large number of which virtually take instructions from the USA while dealing with most international matters. Any action which would not have convinced the Americans and their allies, could have harmed Indian interests. Besides, the countries of the eastern bloc had also to be carried along. The requirement, it was felt, was for launching a diplomatic attack on the problem, before resorting to military action.

On 27 March Major Ziaur Rahman had proclaimed the formation of Independent Bangla Desh, and he had named Mujibur Rahman as its President and Sayed Nazrul Islam the Vice President. The latter, in the capacity of acting President, appointed Tajuddin Ahmed as the Prime Minister and a government-in-exile was formed on 17 April 1971 at Calcutta; the seat of the government was called Mujib Nagar. A radio station was installed for them.

On 31 March 1971 the Indian Parliament unanimously passed a resolution expressing sympathy with the people of East Bengal in their struggle for democratic rights. On 17 April Tajuddin Ahmed, after having been appointed the Prime Minister, went on air to request the world community for help in their struggle for the liberation of Bangla Desh. But the formation of independent Bangla Desh had been announced by Major Ziaur Rahman, and although he had

stated that the structure of the government that he had announced was in keeping with the wishes of Mujib, the fact was that it was Zia who announced the government, and in keeping with his orders the government-in-exile started functioning. What prompted Zia to make the announcement? Was he in touch with the Awami League through its military wing under Colonel Osmani, or was this a move of the army majors set to secure a share in power? The movement's original aim was to secure for the Bengalis equitable share in the running of Pakistan, in the earnings and opportunities, exercising the democratic rights. It was not intended to be a secessionist movement. The question of secession must have been seriously considered by the Awami League after the Assembly meet was indefinitely postponed by Yahya on 1 March. Indeed it must have been seriously considered on a number of occasions earlier: at the time of the first postponement of elections in September 1970; after the November cyclone. But never had the party, or its leader, appeared to have given in to this idea. It appears they were keen to resolve the issue around the nucleus of the six points. On 7 March it was widely expected that Mujib would sever the tie with West Pakistan and declare independence. He did not do so, to the disappointment of a million of his followers who had assembled to listen to him. After the events which took place between 2 and 26 March in which Bengalis attacked the non-Bengalis, and the subsequent crackdown by the West Pakistan military, the common identity of the eastern and the western wings was totally ruled out. Zia's declaration was, therefore, logical. But why him? A government-in-exile was formed after the declaration, and it adopted the structure as had been given out by him. This was not in keeping with the known stand the Awami League had taken all along. The government-in-exile, therefore, had come into being on the basis of the declaration of Major Ziaur Rahman, and, from this point of time, that was exactly how Zia and his associates operated: as leaders of the new movement!

7. The resistance

The government-in-exile appointed Colonel M.A.G. Osmani as the Commander-in-Chief of all militant elements. He was a bachelor from Sylhet, educated at the Muslim University Aligarh, was commissioned in the Indian Army Service Corps during the Second World War, and after partition was assigned to the East Bengal Regiment. He appeared a trifle too stiff and pompous for the kind of ragtag outfit he was commander of, and generally gave the impression that he could do with a bit more of sense of humour. It was said of him that he had not hit off with the Pak Army brass who were mostly Punjabis, and did not make much of a headway as a result, and was retired as a full colonel, which fact he had held against the Punjabi-dominated Army and the Government. He made a lot of show of enthusiasm in carrying out the tasks allotted to him, but in reality hardly exercised any decisive control over the developments or the movement of events. He had been placed there basically to impress upon all, militants or otherwise, that the struggle for independence was being controlled by the government-in-exile, and not the individual militant leaders operating in different areas. Besides, being an elected MNA he had considerable political influence, and basically he was there, C-in-C and all, on that strength. De facto he was functioning hardly any better than a liaison officer between the various elements involved in the Bangla struggle on the one hand, and the Indian military commanders on the other. However, both the government-in-exile and the government of India made much of him and showed a lot of dependence upon him for the coordination and directing of the operations of the militants.

On the ground the militants comprised the units of the East Bengal Regiment (EBR), the Mukti Bahini with its regular and guerilla wings, and a host of other guerilla organisations. The EBR units were trained regular

infantry battalions of the Pakistan Army, and once they acquired the battalion-level support weapons, there was little problem in employing them in regular warfare. As for the Mukti Bahini, the majority of its members were students, or fairly well educated young men of villages. One of its wings was organised into companies and platoons and trained for regular warfare, while the personnel of the other wing were trained for guerilla warfare including commando tasks. Some suicide squads were also claimed to have been raised out of this force and their main function was to assassinate West Pakistani VIPs, and destroy vital installations, vehicles, ships, bridges and roads.

Of the other guerilla organisatios, prominent were the Qadir Bahini, operating in Tangail area and named after its leader Abdul Qadir Siddqi, a young college student who had had a stint in the Pakistan Army, and the Mujib Bahini, an organisation of students which was active in and around Dacca. Each of these claimed membership of over 20,000.

Pakistan was clearly not prepared to take back the refugees. Every time the issue was raised they attempted to smother it with platitudes and lies; they went to the extent of saying that the refugee camps were filled with Indian nationals for propaganda purposes. They accused India of conspiring to break up their country, and pitched up a war psychosis. In this they had the tacit and covert support of the USA and China; as the year 1971 progressed the support became fairly overt, even though the moral factor, with hundreds of thousands of men, women and children killed, and millions trudging across the borders into India, and millions of others already living in the Indian refugee camps, had its own weight, and prevented the two countries from directly interceding on behalf of Pakistan. At this stage only an independent Bangla Desh could have solved the Indian dilemma.

India reached out to the world forums, to all nations, the UN, the peoples of the world, and told them what had happened, and was still happening in East Pakistan. The problem was sought to be handled in three stages. The first stage visualised only a diplomatic assault. In the second stage this was to be dovetailed with the efforts being put in by the militant and non-militant organisations of the

Bengalis, and, finally, if the problem of the refugees still remained unresolved, the solution of the problem was to be sought militarily.

At the diplomatic level the aim was to somehow persuade the Pakistanis to take back their nationals residing in the Indian refugee camps, even though no significant success was possible on account of the Pak attitude. Consequently, no success was achieved. The thrust was to isolate Pakistan diplomatically. Pakistan had staunch supporters in the Middle East, but their support was restricted basically to money. Since the boom of the petrodollars had not yet hit the world, the capability of this support was not very significant. For India the main problems could come from the USA and China. The latter could put up a show of force on India's northern borders and thus not only tie down a large part of the Indian military capability, but also precipitate a crisis by forcibly occupying Indian territory. As for the USA, the possibility of their joining war on the Pakistani side was remote, but they could impose economic sanctions, and also have some of the major western nations to follow their example, which could fairly cripple the Indian economy and industrial growth. The deeds of the West Pakistanis spoke for themselves and India fairly succeeded in isolating them, even though she could not muster sufficient support to exert pressure which might have forced them to take back their nationals. In whatever achievement they scored, India, no doubt, took full advantage of the propaganda value generated by the Calcutta-based Bangla Desh government-in-exile.

The aim of the Bengali resistance now was to wrest power from the military dictatorship and establish an independent, sovereign Bengali nation. To achieve this a call for revolt had been given by Major Ziaur Rahman on Chittagong radio on 27 March 1971. Some EBR battalions had revolted even before the call, but after this all the remaining EBR battalions, and all the paramilitary forces, including the police, also joined in. However, the Pak military machine operated swiftly, and troops were moved from the western wing, and by 10 April important cantonments and towns were fairly under government control. By the middle of May the Government had restored law and order over almost the entire East Pakistan. The

militants were required not only to be reorganised but given a positive boost. They needed training, planning, weapons, leadership. Only India could provide that, and if she did not, the 10 million refugees were there to stay; the cost of keeping them was likely to be of the order of Rs. 700 crore per year, a burden India could ill afford without seriously disrupting her own economy.

The first thing was the reorganisation of the guerillas, and the regular Bengali military units. The guerillas were split into two camps: company-level units for regular warfare, and the irregular guerillas. The sub-units meant for regular warfare were officered by 150-odd young students selected for the purpose and trained as such. The units were given training at section, platoon, company level at the training camps established around the periphery of East Pakistan. Some of these officers were given even to the newly raised battalions of EBR, or to augment the strength of the old battalions. These companies were called the Mukti Fauj companies and generally worked alongside the units of the Indian Army, or, rarely, in conjunction with the elements of the guerillas, to harrass and cause attrition on the West Pakistanis.

Then came the guerillas. They were trained mainly in demolition and laying mines, with a view to basically attacking the total communications system. Now and then they were asked to effect destruction of army dumps and installations, but they lacked the required experience, tenacity and determination, and could not achieve much. In common parlance the guerillas and the Mukti Fauj together were called the Mukti Bahini, although the term covered even the battalions of the EBR, and other paramilitary forces.

Around the end of April 1971, when the movement of the militants had virtually fizzled out and the Pakistan Army had virtually established control over the major part of the eastern wing, India had to move in to reorganise the Bengali militants and put life back into their struggle. Under the control of Indian Eastern Command at Calcutta a control headquarters was established with three sector headquarters, one each at Agartala, Cooch Bihar and Balurghat. The sector headquarters, D Sector, at Agartala

was commanded by Brigadier Shahbeg Singh. The task of these headquarters was to raise and train the Mukti Fauj companies, and to plan and coordinate the activities of the guerillas. The Bengali government-in-exile and its C-in-C, Colonel Osmani, played a significant part in this entire activity.

There were around 33,000 Bengalis of all ranks in the Pakistan Armed Forces. Five battalions of EBR were readily available, though with depleted strengths. Their deficiencies in manpower were made up from the East Pakistan Rifles units, and in weapons the battalions were brought up to the level of the Indian army units. Another three battalions were similarly organised and equipped. In addition an artillery regiment was also raised, and the entire force was split into three brigades with one battery of guns each. However, when these battalions were deployed for operations they had to be appreciably reinforced with additional Indian artillery, infantry and signal resources.

Bengali defectors from Pakistan Navy, 50-odd in number, took over two light-class ships armed with 40 mm Bofors. These were used in the estuaries. About 10 air force officers and 30 air men got one Dakota, an Otter, and an Alouette helicopter to man. The latter two were lightly armed. The aircraft were basically used for communications, although during the operations they were assigned some combat missions as well.

Besides being numerically inferior the Mukti Bahini, or the EBR, did not possess the class of people who could defeat their opponents in combat. They were highly motivated, no doubt, but lacked skill and adequate courage. Perhaps they were under pressure too from their friends and relations who were getting increasingly disenchanted with the freedom movement. Trade and commerce had come to a halt. Jute factories were not working. In a country perennially deficient of food grains, the distribution system had been badly disturbed. There was unemployment. With the breakdown of law and order, there was an increase in gangsterism. Originally the Bahinis were after pople who were loyal to the Federal Government of Pakistan, but later people started settling old scores as well under the garb of patriotism. Opinion

against the movement was building up amongst a section of people in the villages and towns. Some people were getting tired of the continuous state of anarchy.

Around the middle of May 1971, it was realised that unless Mukti Bahini or the EBR secured some spectacular successes, the grass-root Bengali would soon start considering the movement a failure and get reconciled to living with the dictatorship of the western wing. A monsoon offensive was planned. Guerillas and the Mukti Fauj sprang into action. Small military detachments, military vehicles, police stations and police parties were attacked. People loyal to the regime were killed. Roads were mined, bridges demolished and power stations and electric installations were blown up. Ships were attacked in Chittagong and Chalna by trained frogmen. In Chalna between 18 and 22 September frogmen planted limpet mines and damaged or destroyed four ships, one oil tanker and one barge. Attempts were made to damage coasters, jetties, ferries, jute godowns. Tea and jute factories in Sylhet and elsewhere were attacked. There was a bomb explosion in Dacca's Intercontinental Hotel. There were many occasions when police stations were temporarily seized. Bengali Razakars and the like were rendered ineffective as reprisals against those acting against the interests of the Bahini were severe and swift. Rumours were spread to frighten the people, and the radio station allotted to the government-in-exile worked incessantly. Threatening letters were written to officials and non-officials loyal to the Government in Rawalpindi, and often the threats were carried out causing fear and panic. By October the Bahini record was as follows:

Explosions in public/private places	- 500
Government offices/godowns attacked	- 200
Police stations attacked	- 300
Bridges damaged/destroyed	- 250
Railway lines attacked	- 125
Electric installations damaged/ destroyed	- 100
Banks/treasuries looted	- 20

3000 to 5000 non-Bengalis or members of their families were killed as collaborators.

Figuratively speaking, Bengalis had got themselves planted right in the guts of their tormentors, and they had

inflicted a heavy damage upon the operational machinery of the Government. The police had been virtually compromised. Even Army men did not feel safe singly or in small detachments. Ships, trains and vehicles could move only during restricted hours and that too under heavy escort. The people respected the Bahini and feared it. They dared not cooperate with the Government. East Pakistan had exploded.

But not with a bang! For its actions were not backed by regular forces. Guerillas can weaken an adversary; they cannot overpower him. Only regular forces can inflict permanent defeat on the enemy. There were hardly any regular forces available at that time apart from the five battalions of the EBR in the process of being reorganised and another three in the process of being raised. By the time the monsoon offensive was launched the strength of the Bahini was around 70,000 to 100,000 men, and this was totally inadequate to take on an equal number of the regular army who were additionally supported by the paramilitary, and were equipped with far superior weaponry, and had the entire resources of the province at their disposal. Besides, the personnel of the Bahini had not been sufficiently baptised in battle. Their capacity to harass the enemy, or strike and hold ground against heavy odds, was limited.

All warfare is a trial of strength between two contending parties. Guerilla warfare is resorted to by dissenting elements of a state against the established authority. This is also resorted to in a situation where alien rule might have been established over a state after the defeat of its regular armed forces, or where the regular forces of one country might want the resisting capability of the opposing country weakened prior to overrunning it. In the initial stages the established authority has all the advantage over the guerillas, and if it is alert and means business, it can counter the guerillas without spending unduly large resources. The first requirement for defeating the guerilla is that the political movement backing them has to be identified as close to the time of its inception as possible, and once that has been done, while continuous political dialogue has to be maintained with the people spearheading the movement, its guerilla wing has to be dealt with most

severely. In the final analysis only political dialogue must be permitted to resolve politically-motivated movements. An alert state has its finger on the thinking and activity of its people all the time. In such a state no guerilla activity can take roots. But, apart from this, a state will always have dissidents of various hues, some so deadly and vengeful as would not hesitate to see the state going down into anarchy. Statecraft lies in not only locating such deadly elements, but also adopting such political measures as would keep the majority of the citizens happy and contented and reduce the dissidence to the absolute minimum.

In the situation under discussion most things had gone right for Pakistan. Ayub, the military dictator, had been overthrown, although, in fairness to the old soldier and his martial law regime, it must be said that the interests of Pakistan as a nation, comprising both wings, could be safeguarded only by a military regime; given to the civilians the country would have split much earlier. Following the overthrow, steps for holding elections were taken and after the contentious issues had surfaced, there were negotiations, and those were still in progress when the country was rocked by a totally unexpected and unforeseen blow in the form of the cyclone of 12/13 November. The whole Bengali nation went into a spontaneous, unplanned revolt. An alert, competent government would have foreseen this, and the Pak Government perhaps had, and that, perhaps, was one of the reasons why they had kept prolonging negotiations with the Awami League. But if they had, they failed to take remedial steps in terms of finding a political solution.

Immediately after the election results were announced Pakistan had around one division-plus in the eastern wing, and once the mood of the electorate and the attitude of the Awami League were known, it should have been clear that the troops present were not adequate if the need for internal security duties arose, in spite of Yahya having likened the Bengalis to mosquitoes. Reinforcements were required. But the situation got out of hand when the Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship was hijacked from Srinagar. Pakistan organised this apparently in a bid to create a focal point and divert the attention of both the wings to it, trying to take advantage of the hate-India sentiment it felt it had

effectively generated. This resulted in the denial of overflights over India, and made the task of reinforcing the eastern wing difficult.

There had always been reluctance on the part of Pakistan to station large contingents of troops in East Bengal. The Government considered India as the major enemy of Pakistan, and assumed that Punjab would have to face the main thrust of the Indian attack. It also recognised a threat from the north-west, from Afghanistan, but did not consider it of that magnitude as would threaten the security or integrity of the country. As a result of this thinking almost the entire Pak army and air force had been deployed facing India, in Punjab and the occupied part of Jammu and Kashmir. Even the southern border of its western wing was comparatively lightly defended. The strategy they followed was fairly simple and straightforward. They held the border with Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, in strength, and held a strong central reserve which they planned to launch at an appropriate stage to deliver the lethal blow. The blow was expected to so unnerve India that not only would she vacate the territories she might have captured, including those along the border with Rajasthan, or in East Pakistan, but, in order to secure deliverance, she would hand over the remaining half of Jammu and Kashmir too, on a platter.

Thus it was that there was only a division-plus of the army and a squadron-plus of the air force in the eastern wing, and the reluctance to substantially reinforce them, for that would have weakened the reserves earmarked to deliver the coup de grace in the west. However, the facts staring in the face could not be put aside and the sector had to be reinforced, and this, no doubt, necessitated the revision of the strike plan. Two divisions minus their heavy weapons and elements of support arms were moved out, and Tikka, the military governor, struck such a lethal blow with the total force available to him that it staggered the Bengalis right down to the roots. Almost all at once the revolt was crushed. The stage was now set for a political settlement. But the Awami League was not prepared to relent from the stand it had taken on the six points, which document west wing politicians considered to be a death warrant for the integrity of Pakistan. They were also not prepared to work in a Bengali-dominated

government. There was a stalemate, though a view was mooted that a solution based on parity of representation between the two wings and substantial decentralisation of authority to the constituent provinces, was possible. There were, thus, pulls and tugs in many directions, and it appeared that, in order to uphold the integrity of the country, the only way out was to continue with the military dictatorship. Perhaps, in course of time, through discussions and parleys, a solution would be found.

By about mid-July it was becoming increasingly clear that the monsoon offensive was not achieving the desired results. In fact, the West Pakistani hold over the situation was improving by the day, even though the Mukti Bahini and those concerned with its operations had laid fairly tall claims about their achievements; the maps published in some of the Indian and foreign newspapers in mid-August showed virtually the whole of East Bengal either already gone under the control of the Bahini or being fought for securing such a control, and the West Pakistani control restricted only to the cantonments. On the ground the situation was different. During April, the personnel of the Border Security Force, posted along the international border went inside East Bengal and brought detailed information about the goings on there. They maintained an unbroken contact with the Bengalis right through May. In August this was not possible, and towards the end of November or early December when the Indian Army went in, they had to fight the West Pakistanis almost in all the areas the Mukti Bahini had claimed to be under their control.

One important contribution of the Mukti Bahini guerillas was the supply of information in respect of the ground, and some information, not always correct, about the activities, location and strength of the West Pakistani units. But those who relied totally on this information were often surprised; the information had always to be carefully sifted. Even about the ground factor, whereas they could supply general information about the lie of the ground, the road conditions or whether the areas were inundated, when it came to the specifics their usefulness became rather limited. There were many instances when the guerillas were unwilling to visit areas generally visited by West Pakistani troops.

Often they did not make it to the areas about which information was required, out of fear. Almost never did they manage to bring information about an intended target, a bridge, culvert, building, which was required to be demolished. They feared that their activity for securing such information would provoke suspicion, and there would be reprisals against their people staying behind or the people of the area from which they were required to get the information.

As for their capacity to disrupt communications, they did achieve success, but not of a magnitude as could ground the West Pakistani administrative machinery. They damaged or destroyed some 285 big and small bridges along the main highways. Some electric pylons were also demolished. But it did not take the Pak army engineers unduly long to either repair the damage or devise suitable alternatives. The communications were through almost upto the last day. Installations like power houses, telephone exchanges, water works, continued to provide the minimum essential cover. Here and there a few trains were derailed, but that caused more problems to the civilians than the army. However, foodgrains moved by river, road and rail, and it is to the credit of the Pakstani administration that essential items required for the day-to-day living were available not only to the army but even to the civilians. That, in a way, indicates the degree of success the Bahini guerillas achieved.

A word about the wing trained for regular warfare, and the EBR. The former did not acquire much of a fighting proficiency. Not that much could be expected of them. It is not possible to put men in regular warfare with short training. There had to be more training, and much more exposure to battle conditions. There had to be experience and expertise. There is no doubt that with the passage of time they would have acquired the necessary skills, but in the middle of 1971 they were a different material altogether. They were motivated, but not skilled enough to withstand the rigours of an intense and a prolonged struggle. Whenever the going became rough they tended to lose heart, or even panic, and give up. To get such people to the level of formidable fighters would have required a long time. And time was at a premium. As for the EBR, their overall strength in the scheme of things was so small that

they hardly made any decisive contribution towards the final outcome of the operations. That, however, is not to suggest that they did not play their part with diligence and steadfastness. They were particularly useful in the initial stages when the Indian Army was not allowed to cross the international border. Being recently raised and reorganised, and getting to work under the Indian system for the first time, they generally showed a lower reliability when compared to the Indian infantry units. One striking feature of their command was the rather large distance between their officers and men, and higher degree of dependence of their officers upon their junior commissioned officers. The pattern was the same as was in vogue in the West Pakistan Army. The officers of the EBR often talked of the higher mechanical-mindedness of the Pakistan Army, the promptness and alacrity with which the orders were carried out, and the modern outlook of their planners. They expressed the opinion that Indian training and equipment, by comparison, was less effective. Some of them had done training abroad and spared no opportunity to rub this point in during their discussions with their Indian comrades. One got the impression that sometimes, they rubbed the point about the modernity of the Pakistani weapons and techniques in retaliation to the low esteem in which the Indians held their performance capability. But often their views appeared genuine, as if given out to forewarn the Indians.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the total Bengali resistance, when viewed in the overall operational context, of which the culmination was the marching in of the Indian Army into East Pakistan, was that it kept the West Pakistani Army fairly on the move, in the initial stages, and on a continuous alert, later. By September, however, Pak Army was sufficiently in command to take to leisure and merry-making. Senior officers in position of authority consorted with the pick of the women of society. Their juniors were not long to follow. When Bengalis serving in the echelons of the Government objected to this kind of development, they were ridiculed, and told that they had every reason to be happy as, in the process, the tall, healthy and light-complexioned West Pakistanis were only improving their ethnic stock. Officially, however, consorting with local women was forbidden and in some cases junior rank and file indeed

were taken to task for misdemeanour. A number of officers and rank and file of the EBR had their families in cantonments under the control of the West Pakistanis, some living it out independently, some staying with friendly West Pakistani army personnel. Major Zia's (later President) own wife was living in a cantonment of the West Pakistanis. There were a number of such people. The remarkable thing was that no one appeared unduly worried about the fidelity of their women, or that they might have been forced into extra-marital sexual relationships. The concern was basically for their safety, and the safety and well-being of their children. Perhaps those women were even better motivated towards the cause.

In the midst of all this, however, one thing stood out clearly: the Bengali resistance just did not have the capability to wrest power from the West Pakistani Army in a hurry, it was going to be a long and arduous struggle. Meanwhile India had the 10 million refugees!

8. Pakistani plan for war

Since the refugees were not going back, what would India do? Would she opt to settle the issue using force, or would she go to the international forums and make appeals? This was the question Pakistan and its foreign advisors debated upon almost till the day actual hostilities broke out. Under the UN rules no sovereign state may attack another sovereign state under any pretext; all disputes must be referred to the UN for resolving. Yet Pakistan was not ruling out the possibility of India getting involved in open hostilities on the Eastern Front. Their plans for a war with India had kept this aspect in view.

In the east the plan was basically defensive, with Dacca having to be defended at all cost. It was formulated on the assumption that the main Indian thrust would be coming from the west, from the direction of Balurghat-Bangaon. A determined attack from the east, based in Tripura, was given a low probability rating because, firstly, Tripura did not possess the necessary infra-structure for mounting a major attack, and, secondly, the launching area was situated at the end of a long and tenuous supply line over which it was difficult to build up stocks or move a large number of troops in the short interval between the time of decision and actual mounting of the offensive.

The original plan of defence was based on the occupation of a restricted perimeter, with Dacca as the nucleus. A number of strong points were to be established along the perimeter and the gaps between them were to be covered with obstacles, firepower and lightly armed troops. There were to be second and third lines of defence behind the main positions. Starting from the east the strong points on the restricted perimeter were Chittagong, Feni, Chandpur, thence along the Meghna to the bridge at Bhairab Bazar, thence along the old Brahmaputra

river to Jamalpur, Bahadurabad Ghat, Phulchari, Bogra, Nator, Rajashahi, thence south-east along the Ganga and then along the Madhumati river. This plan basically defended the area of the central East Bengal with Dacca as the nucleus, and virtually surrendered large chunks of peripheral territory almost immediately after the start of hostilities.

Around July or August 1971, Pakistan intelligence produced an appreciation which concluded that to begin with India would try to secure for the Mukti Bahini only a part of East Bengal, as was visualised by the Agartala conspirators, that this part would be used for installing the Bengla Desh Government and for accommodating Bangali refugees now staying in Indian camps. It was also brought out that, as a sovereign, independent country, and a member of the United Nations, India was not in a position to attack Pakistan, another independent country and also a member of the United Nations. On the basis of this appreciation the defence plans were revised, and a forward posture of defence based on border outposts (BOPs) was adopted. According to this policy the border was sealed and orders were issued that not even an inch of the territory would be allowed to fall into the hand of the insurgents.

In keeping with this policy, a ring of BOPs was established. These outposts were meant to be supported by strong points which were so sited as would lie in the way of any major Indian thrust; the strong points were stocked for 7 to 15 days. Reserves to last another 15 to 20 days were held in the second and third lines of defence. The strong points were essentially the communications centres like Jessore, Khulna, Jhenida, Bogra, Comilla, Laksham, Chittagong. Gaps between strong points were to be kept under surveillance and, if required, counter attacks could be mounted by the reserves held in the rear.

The forward-leaning plan was made on the premise that only the insurgents would attack, with or without overt Indian backing. If India rendered only indirect help, the forward defence would effectively be able to check the insurgents. But if India joined the insurgents openly, the Security Council and the United Nations would intervene and force her to resile, and if she did not, China, most

probably, would espouse Pakistan's cause and frighten India out of the conflict, or might even join Pakistan to defeat the Indian aggression. Besides, there would be the US sanctions now that that country had favourably tilted towards Pakistan, more so after Pakistan had served as their intermediary and the channel for negotiations with China and also for securing the visit of the US President to that country. Under the circumstances, the only danger Pakistan faced was from the insurgents, and it was considered imperative that they be not allowed any foothold in the country.

However, for successful implementation of the new plan there had to be a total control over the law and order situation so that supplies, ammunition, troops and transport could be moved around without let or hindrance, by rail, road or river. During the counter insurgency period this had virtually been achieved, but whether that would be possible during a hot war, with the whole country hostile to the West Pakistanis, was something that could only be guessed. While the plan had its supporters, those who supported the inner perimeter concept felt that the plan was not practical. But the major snag in the inner perimeter plan was that it left undefended more than half of East Pakistan for the insurgents to occupy at will and install the government of free Bangla Desh. Once that happened it would not be possible to oust that government politically because of the known Bengali aspirations, or militarily because of the Indian backing. Its strength, however, lay in the fact that it afforded an opportunity to whatever military force there was in East Pakistan, to hold on to a very defensible perimeter long enough to permit Pak allies to intercede favourably on their behalf. On balance the forward-leaning plan was considered to be more logical, and was accepted.

In order to further ensure that the insurgents did not have a free run because of the Indian backing, there was a contingency plan for the western wing. It had been visualised that India would adopt a defensive posture in the west at the time of attacking East Pakistan. To neutralise the Indian thrust in the east, a staggering blow in the form of a counter offensive was planned to be given in the west. This thrust was designed to force India to pull back in the east ad hurriedly transfer troops and

resources to the west, to save that part. Territory gained in the west would also be used as a bargaining lever to secure the withdrawal of India's backing to the insurgents. The process would also provide time to the Pak allies to dominate the world forums on their behalf and, thus, secure neutralisation of the Indian support to the Bengali goverment-in-exile.

The counter offensive force was to be a corps of one armoured and two infantry divisions. This force was to be further reinforced with infantry and armoured formations, when the opporunities afforded so required, by appropriate regroupings. The plan was fairly straightforward. All formations in contact with the Indians along the international border/Ceasefire line would be mainly in the holding role, bearing sufficient pressure on the Indians so as to prevent them from any major regrouping. They would launch local attacks to improve their defensive posture, and also so deceive the Indians as to make them believe that the strike force was assembled for a task other than what was planned for it. In the scheme of things 12 Infantry Division was to capture Poonch and simulate activity as would prevent Indian reserves from moving south of river Chenab, while 23 Infantry Division at Gujarat was to capture the line of Manawar Tawi and simulate offensive for the capture of Naushara and Rajauri. 1 Corps had been ordered to capture Dharam Enclave of India situated on the wrong side of Ravi near Narowal and simulate offensive to draw the local reserves into the Shakargarh salient. The task allotted to 4 Corps at Lahore-Kasur-Sulaimanki was to close upto the Chaugawan drain, between river Ravi and the Grand Trunk road, and undertake local offensive to improve its posture and fix the Indian reserves in the area. The rest of the border of 900 kilometres between Rahimyar Khan and Rann of Kutch, was the responsibility of 18 Infantry Division. One brigade of this Division was to defend the Khokrapar-Umarkot approach, and the rest of the Division had been given the offensive task of capturing Ramgarh, 65 kilometres inside the Indian territory, and Jaisalmer, another 65 kilometres away.

The strike force was to come into action as soon as the holding formations had completed ther tasks. One view was that the force should strike as soon as India launched the

attack in the east. But it was argued that without pinning down the Indian reserves and improving the defensive postures, the chances of success were not bright. Besides, there could always be that situation when the Pakistani strike force might get spent while still fighting the Indian holding formations and the Indian reserves might be intact. Such a situation could spell disaster for Pakistan. Consequently the strike was planned to be effected only after the holding formations had done their job. But the need to launch the strike as soon as, or soon after the Indians had opened their eastern offensive, was accepted. The decision was that defence headquarters would keep a close watch on the Indian deployments in the east and the support they provided to the insurgents, and when it became clear that they were about to attack, Pakistan would make a pre-emptive strike in the west, and in the interval between the pre-emptive strike and Indian eastern offensive, the holding formations would complete the tasks allotted to them.

Feverish activity was got going in East Pakistan to implement the plans approved by the GHQ. The President warned India that any encroachment in East Pakistan would result in open war. Full attention was given to the law and order situation, and measures against the insurgency were intensified; stamping out of the insurgency was essential for the success of the forward-leaning plan. The local police was found to be unequal to the task, and where police duties were entrusted to the soldiers, there were excesses as the soldiers found it difficult to identify the insurgents from the locals. Consequently, large police contingents were brought in from the west and they were given some local volunteers. All this was in addition to EPCAF which was, as stated earlier, mainly a force comprising personnel from the west, and Razakars, mainly Bengalis including Biharis, and Mujahids who were non-Bengali volunteers. This reorganisation and firm action against the insurgents afforded the military a fair amount of freedom of movement. This also permitted a fairly free movement of food grains and other items of necessity, although now and then escorts had to be provided. At that time it appeared that the insurgents had been outnumbered and overwhelmed.

On 3 September 1971, on advice from the US Government, Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, who had become

very unpopular on account of the extremely drastic military actions he had taken against the Bengalis, was replaced by Dr. A.M.Malik as Governor. This also gave a civilian touch to the military administration. Dr. Malik, 74, a dentist turned politician, was a respected senior Bengali leader, and it was hoped that this appointment would somewhat assuage the hostility of the Bengalis. The command of the military and the paramilitary forces now came fully under Lieutenant General A.A.K. Niazi, who had taken over these functions from Tikka Khan on 11 April, after his arrival at Dacca; with the departure of Tikka even the function of the Martial Law Administrator came under him. At this time the Pakistani military strength in East Pakistan was as under:

- Headquarters 9, 14 and 16 Infantry Divisions. - Headquarters 36 Infantry Division. This was actually Headquarters EPCAF, and the infantry division number was given for deception purposes. It was given 93 Infantry Brigade for the defence of the Mymensingh sector.
- Headquarters 39 Infantry Division; an ad hoc headquarters, basically for deception purposes. It later functioned as an effective divisional headquarters.
- Thirteen headquarters infantry brigades and one skeleton brigade headquarters.
- Thirty-five regular infantry battalions. One armoured regiment and two squadrons of American Chaffee tanks. Six field regiments, five independent mortar batteries, and one light anti-aircraft battery.
- Five to seven battalions of Mujahids; not effective enough. 100,000 Razakars were planned to be recruited. Actual strength including that of Mujahids, was around 75,000. In addition there were Ansars, Masud Scouts, EPCAF.
- Air Force had about 20 F-86 fighter aircraft. Some gunboats operated in the coastal and inland waters.

Around the middle of November, when the Indians started their preliminary operations, and border posts controlling salients of territory jutting into India started getting lost, and particularly after the Indian operations in Dhalai and Belonia, Niazi carried out

another appreciation of the situation, on the assumption that India would invade East Pakistan with a view to capturing the whole of it, and on the basis of this made a request to Rawalpindi for two more infantry divisions. He sent his Chief of Staff and Major General Jamshed to explain the case. It is quite likely that Niazi had by then a fairly accurate detail of the Indian plan of attack. Rawalpindi promised him eight battalions - which was almost a division - out of which only five arrived by the end of November and got parcelled out to various sectors in companies and platoons. Niazi later, after the surrender, lamented that if he had received at least the remaining three promised battalions, he would have been in a position to defend Dacca more resolutely.

9. Indian operational plan for the eastern sector

Around July 1971 it was fairly clear to the Indians that Pakistan had no intention of taking back her 10 million nationals residing in the Indian refugee camps, that to accomplish this there would have to be Bangla Desh, that to have that East Pakistan would have to be attacked. The Indian formations detailed for the task got their first briefing in August. Taking the topography of the land into account a plan had been evolved to invest East Bengal from four directions. The land is one of the flatest in the world, barely a few feet above the sea. The offensive thrust lines were decided on the basis of the lie of major rivers. The broad plan was as follows:

(a) Capture by 4 Corps of all territory east of river Meghna and its tributary Baulai. This involved capture of Sylhet, Daudkandi, Chandpur and Chittagong.

(b) Capture by Headquarters 101 Communications Zone Area with troops under their command, the area between Meghna and the Brahmaputra. Initially 93 Infantry Brigade group was to be made available for this purpose, and an infantry battalion was to be para-dropped for the capture of Tangail. Another brigade was to be made available if capture of Dacca became possible. The initial task involved the capture Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Tangail.

(c) Capture by 33 Corps of territory between the Brahmaputra and the Ganga. This required the capture of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra and Rajshahi.

(d) Capture by 2 Corps of territory west of the Ganga. This required capture of Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Kushtia.

To carry out the tasks 4 Corps was given three mountain divisions, while 2 Corps had one infantry and one mountain division and 33 Corps had one mountain division, one headquarters mountain division and two mountain brigades.

It will be seen that the emphasis of the plan was for the capture of territory of East Bengal which lay towards the Indian side of the major rivers. Obviously the Indian planners had strong doubts about their capability to cross the major rivers; a close scrutiny of the plan reveals that there was virtually no planning for crossing the major rivers. The idea apparently was to install Bangla Desh in the captured territory and put the refugees there. Perhaps another reason for giving limited objectives (or excluding the Dacca bowl) was the limited time available for completing the task. For, if India opened the hostilities as they would have to, Pakistan would surely take the case to the international forums including the UN, who were bound to ask for the cessation of hostilities and urge the two countries to settle the dispute through negotiations. India could not afford to annoy at least some members of the UN. Because of the US tilt, western European countries would not have viewed the Indian attack in a favourable light. India would have had problems in the Middle East as well.

Then there was the China factor. If that country staged a show of force along the northern borders of India, the situation could become difficult. In a crowning diplomatic success, India and Russia had signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation in August 1971. This was a factor that would have deterred the Chinese from taking a rash step, but even then the China factor was there and had to be taken note of.

The timing of the rain in East Pakistan was another important consideration. It pours there except from about the middle of November to around the middle of February. During rains, the country virtually goes under water; water channels become wide and deep and swift in flow, and there are problems all around, particularly when large-scale movement is involved, more so when movement has to be cross-country as well. Even during the three dry months, even though the land is drained, marshes abound, and cross country-movement is still very difficult.

The dry months of winter took care, to some extent, of the China factor, for all passes between India and Tibet are heavily snow-bound during this time and a land attack from either direction is very difficult. During the 1965 operations the Chinese had rattled the sword in support of Pakistan, and since it was the month of September then, Indians had to take note of it. Indians were being careful this time.

Taking into account the above-mentioned factors the consensus was that around three weeks would be available for open hostilities against Pakistan, and therefore, that was the time in which whatever tasks were given to the military formations, were to be completed. It was felt at the UN that the issue could be stalled, with a couple of Russian vetoes, for about this time. American pressure was anticipated, but then it was noted that within the US Government a strong lobby supported the Indian stand because of the shabby treatment the West Pakistanis had meted out to their own countrymen. The US press, which had a much better understanding of the goings on in East Bengal, was hostile to the Pakistani Government and was sympathetic to the idea of Bengali independence. US public opinion was also tilted towards the Bengalis. But the Indians, perhaps, were not entirely aware of the ardour the US President felt for the Pakistanis.

In the middle of 1971 Pakistan had acquired a special status in the eyes of the US President and his advisor Doctor Henry Kissinger, as she was the only channel available to them for negotiations with China. The President wanted a friendly dialogue with that country before the summit with the Russians scheduled for 1972, possibly with a view to using this as a bargaining lever. He also wanted Chinese support to contain the growing Russian influence in South East Asia and the Middle East. Pakistan, therefore, had become a close ally of the US, and the President and his advisor felt that if their interests were not protected, the US would lose credibility with other allies like Turkey and Iran. They maintained a close watch on the developments in the subcontinent, and made it pretty hot for India barely within 10 days of the start of open hostilities from 3 December 1971. Considering this, the time limit of three weeks that the Indians had given themselves for completing the operations in East Pakistan, was, perhaps, on the optimistic side.

Apart from the operations in East Pakistan, the Defence Services had also been given the task of defending the country against any Chinese attack from the north. The Defence Services were also to ensure, by taking appropriate defensive and offensive measures, that in the west, Pakistan did not take any territory in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab or Rajasthan. In view of this, large-scale pull-out of troops from the formations deployed along the Indo-Chinese or Indo-West Pakistan borders, was not possible. The units or formations available were either those engaged in counter insurgency in eastern India, who were helping the civil authorities in maintaining law and order in West Bengal or Tripura or Mizoram or Nagaland, or the reserves stationed in different parts of the country. In the scheme of things most of these divisions and brigades, earmarked for operations in East Pakistan, were to revert to the original role after a swift operation, and during the interval the holding formations and the remaining reserves were to keep any enemy at bay, if such a contingency arose.

The formations were, in the first instance, required to improve their posture for defence, and in some cases it meant capture of some Pakistani territory adjoining the Indian border. Besides, as part of training, it was essential to give experience to troops to operate against a live enemy. There had to be, therefore, a lot of aggressive patrolling, a number of limited offensives which would not only improve the posture but also give the troops a taste of war.

In the meantime efforts to justify an attack on East Pakistan were continuing at the diplomatic level. By end July the Indian plan appears to have been fairly finalised, and by early August movement and groupings of units and formations had begun. In May 1971 the Indian Prime Minister had made a statement to the effect that the refugees would be able to go back by the end of the year. In fact, India had assured the UN Commission for Refugees that the aid would not be required beyond the month of December 1971. The Indians were quite clear about the fact that there would have to be a war. Emissaries were sent to different countries to explain the import of the developments in the sub-continent by holding talks, distributing pamphlets and leaflets, or whatever other

means they could get hold of. During May/June Jaya Prakash Narayan alone visited 46 countries for this purpose.

On 9 August 1971 the Friendship Treaty with Russia had been signed, and this was followed by a visit of the Prime Minister to Russia in late September. Soviet attitude within and without the United Nations, and the Security Council, was that their Government would support India till a political solution acceptable to India had been found. Great Britain, France, West Germany, Belgium and Austria had decided not to get involved in the conflict. The US Government appreciated the enormity of the problem caused by the Bengali refugees and offered $500 million in aid. They were of the opinion that a rapprochement between the two wings of Pakistan was possible provided India did not support the secessionist Bengali movement and train their guerillas. Although they did not rule out the possibility of failure of the rapprochement process, they felt that it would be wrong on the part of India to resort to war without giving adequate chance to the two wings to resolve their differences through negotiations. Accordingly, they counselled India to refrain from war, and told Yahya to create conditions for the return of the refugees and start of negotiations. The Indians, however, were convinced that the US Government was not seeing the realities of the situation. They said the Pak military regime, by arresting Mujib and perpetrating genocide of the Bengalis, had already sealed the issue and gone well beyond the point of no return. There was no possibility of any reconciliation after what the Pak military had done in East Bengal. However, they felt, Yahya had all the time to mend fences till end November/early December when weather and terrain conditions would be suitable for India to launch its attack. The White House assessment was that India could crush the Pak armed forces in East Pakistan in a matter of three or four days, and then switch to the western wing and dismember that too. This, it felt, was likely to give a global dimension to the conflict and was likely to bring in the super powers. The White House was of the view that India wanted to entice Pakistan to an all-out war and, after defeating it militarily on both the wings, advance the Bangla nationhood argument in respect of the constituent provinces of the western wing as well. Further, the US had treaty obligations towards Pakistan

which, in effect, required the US to go to their aid in the event of an attack by India, and that non-fulfilment of such obligations would have a demoralising effect on other countries with whom the US had similar treaties. The State Department, however, was of the opinion that under the 1958 Middle East Eisenhower Doctrine there was no binding obligation, particularly when it came to matters concerning Pakistani problems vis-a-vis India, that, in any case, the merits of the problem had always to be considered and that the US could not go to war in support of a country even when that country happened to be in the wrong.

Between 16 October and 12 November the Indian Prime Minister visited Great Britain, France, West Germany, Belgium, Austria and the USA to personally put across the Indian point of view and assess the reactions of these countries. Whereas her point of view was well received by the Western European nations, she could not convince the US President and his advisor, Dr. Henry Kissinger, of the need for an immediate permanent solution to the Bengali problem. The President insisted that the solution had to be found through the process of negotiations and offered to help in whatever way his Government could. He was averse to the solution being sought for militarily.

To the Indian Prime Minister the implications of the arguments must have been abundantly clear. Negotiatory talks would lead to endless arguments and counter arguments at national and international levels, and many world forums, and there would be resolutions and counter resolutions, and counter resolutions and vetoes, and so on, but the issues would stay, unresolved. The Bangla problem would enter into such complicated political and diplomatic labyrinths that it would possibly become unresolvable, and the refugees would stay on, till they either perished or got merged with the Indian people, adding manifold to India's already heavy burden of poverty. India had seen that happen in 1947 when partition took place, and in 1949 when India took the Kashmir problem to the Security Council. What major issues had the UN resolved, anyway? If Yahya did not take back the refugees, India would be left with no alternative but to forcibly create conditions for their return, and that meant creation of an independent, secular Bangla Desh. But it

was not easy to disregard what the Americans were saying. They were saying they wished India well, that India had been by far the principal beneficiary of US development assistance and since her independence had received around $10 billion in aid, that during the previous year the US aid contribution had been $700 million out of $1.2 billion that came to India from all sources, that they felt committed to the progress and development of this country and its democratic experiment which would be of profound significance to many of the countries in the underdeveloped world. All they were asking for was a solution through negotiations and not through war. The world in general, apparently, was impressed by this approach as was evident from the voting pattern on this issue in December 1971 at the UN as well as the Security Council.

The US Government was of the view that while the human problem of giving aid to the refugees could be attended to immediately, the negotiatory process to resolve the issues between the eastern and the western wings of Pakistan would take time. The Indian Government could hardly afford to wait. It was under heavy public pressure, more so after it was being openly accused of having missed the opportunity in April 1971 by being unduly hesitant; hesitation implied a lack of preparedness, confidence and guts. If they missed the December opportunity they would perhaps never get another chance: there would be too much talk at the world forums, and Pakistan would get all the chance to further reinforce its positions in East Bengal, and US pressure would increase, and China would get actively involved and so on. There was every reason to believe that the opportunity would be missed needlessly, for no one was prepared to guarantee that an agreement between the two wings of Pakistan would be reached, although the US view was that some form of autonomy for East Pakistan would have to be there if a lasting political solution had to be found. They did not condone the military action, and from early April 1971 had stopped issuing and renewing licences for military shipments to Pakistan, and also held back the supplies of arms that had been committed the year before. New commitments for economic development loans were also stopped. This shut off $35 million worth of arms, and after shipping $5 million worth of spare parts, already in the pipeline under earlier licences, all supplies had ceased.

After the signing of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty the US President had it known that any aggression by India on Pak territory would force the US not only to cut off all military aid, but economic aid as well. The US felt the main aim of the Indo-Soviet treaty was to prevent the Chinese from coming to the aid of Pakistan in the event of open hostilities with India; Russia could threaten China in the Sinkiang region. They felt India and the Soviet Union were extracting an advantage from US public opinion which, after the pull-out from Vietnam, was loath to any interference in other people's affairs unless American security was positively and categorically threatened. They felt that such an attitude, if allowed to go unchallenged, would demoralise the countries friendly to the US. On 19 November 1971, after the Indian Prime Minister's return to New Delhi, a message was received from the US through their ambassador in New Delhi, to the effect that Yahya was prepared to make concessions and work for the establishment of civilian rule. Later it was also given out that an indication was given to the Indian Government that Yahya was working for or was agreeable to the grant of autonomy to East Pakistan. But Ambassador Kenneth B. Keating, US Ambassador to India, has refuted this. Whatever the contents of the message, the Indian Government must have been disconcerted, for that was not the time for promises; by then the Government had already given the 'go' order to the armed forces and it was hardly possible to retract it, not on the basis of empty promises, anyway. If Yahya was agreeable to autonomy or any other measures calculated to solve the regional issues, he must immediately implement them. After all, his was a story of broken promises, of subterfuge, of lies and false accusations. Hundreds of thousands of people had died, and millions had been rendered homeless, stateless, on account of the methods and policies pursued by him. India would have been accused of criminal naivete if it had reacted to the US suggestion. The wail of 10 million people crammed up in one corner of this country, was so tragic and heart-rending that no one could ignore it, and check the process which was designed to secure their emancipation. There had to be a solution, if not by peaceful means, then by war.

It is often asked: Were the Indian Defence Services in a position to march in and complete the operation within a

week or 10 days? For, that was the speed required if actual and imagined external and internal pressures were to be taken care of in East Pakistan. The strength of the Pakistani army before 4 April was just one infantry division (four brigades), strung all over the country on internal security duties. Between 4 and 15 April, Pakistan 9 and 16 Infantry Divisions had also been inducted, but they had yet to restore the federal authority and were more than committed on internal security; they were in that state till about 10 May. But even after that it took them quite a while before they were organised enough to face some kind of external aggression. Between April and December some additional reinforcements of manpower, weapons, equipment also came in, contributing to the improvement of the lot of the Army; the last five infantry battalions, out of the eight promised, arrived towards the end of November.

All along Indian wherewithal was available close at hand. 4 Mountain Division was already in West Bengal on internal security duties, and so was Ranchi-based 9 Infantry Division. 33 Corps had the major portion of the force which was subsequently deployed against the Pakistanis in the north-western sector, already with it, while 4 Corps divisions had to move only from Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram. After Pakistani crackdown on Bengalis in March 1971, Indians should have been on the alert and ready for any eventuality, including a showdown. For, contentious issues like independence for East Bengal, or the six-point programme, never get sorted out through negotiations. If there was any chance for a peaceful solution, the situation would not have come to a boil. After the Pakistani crackdown, how could any right-minded person imagine a peaceful solution was possible? By throwing out 10 million Bengalis into India (8 million Hindus), the Punjabi was hammering out the final solution. Exodus would provide the excuse for re-election in which the Bengali majority would have been taken care of (it had already been reduced by 10 million). Besides, the local population could be placated by disribution of evacuee property amongst them.

All this was known, and India waited. In its 23 years of existence with Pakistan, India had not learnt to react to the moves and events in that country. Only a section of

the Indian population and its press were alive to the dangers inherent for India in the goings on there. They sounded the alarm. But the Indian bureaucracy, the military, and political leadership preferred to look the other way, hoping that the situation would somehow get resolved, that they would not have to get involved in it.

Word had gone round in international circles that India was being deliberate in this whole business, basically because she had the intention to dismember the whole of Pakistan, including its western wing. This idea had essentially been sponsored by America, and was shared by the Western European countries. Both America and the press in the UK claimed they were in contact with highly dependable sources, that the conclusions drawn by them were based on the intelligence supplied by such sources.

The position was that on the western front we had around 12 infantry divisions, one armoured division, two independent infantry brigades, two armoured brigades, three artillery brigades, and one para brigade. Opposing this, Pakistan had ten infantry and two armoured divisions (including two infantry divisions under raising to replace the two sent to East Bengal), two independent armoured brigades, two artillery brigades and two independent infantry brigades. After the termination of hostilities in the east, India could have pulled out around three infantry divisions enough, with some additional artillery, to reinforce the western thrust.

As for the Air Force, India had 45 of all types of squadrons including transport squadrons, against 13 of Pakistan. In the Navy we had more surface vessels, but the Pakistanis were stronger in submarines. And we had one aircraft carrier.

Other factors notwithstanding, on the basis of numerical considerations alone, India's capability to deliver a knock-out blow to West Pakistan was ruled out. The bulk of the Indian force was deployed encircling Pakistani Punjab, defending which the bulk of the Pakistani forces were also deployed. And Punjab is what Pakistan is all about. Terrain-wise it is a difficult country, infested with rivers and canals. It is possible that an attacking force, even when it has near parity vis-

a-vis the defender, can create local conditions of superiority and make substantial gains. Why, it can even deliver a coup-de-grace if the defender is poorly organised, or does not have his heart in the battle, or is not sufficiently motivated. Such conditions did not then exist in West Pakistan, though there were some non-Punjabi officers and troops who felt they did not have to go beyond a point in the process of battle developments, and did not have to unnecessarily expose themselves, or get themselves killed in the event of a situation turning unfavourable, more so when it was believed that most gains following upon a success in battle went to those with influence, who were mostly Punjabis. But the bulk of the forces were Punjabis or Punjabi-dominated, and, therefore, such an attitude, even if extant, did not count for much. Conditions of local superiority would give local victories, no doubt, but to keep those victories, eventual destruction of hostile forces would have been necessary. India just did not have the wherewithal for all this. India just did not have the superiority to force a decision in Punjab, fighting in the midst of people blisteringly hostile to it. If a hitting force possessing sufficient punch had been gathered to deliver a blow at Sind or Baluchistan or even North West Frontier Province, the possibility of India aiming at dismemberment of West Pakistan could have been conjectured. But under the circumstances, the way India's forces were deployed, there was no question of it hoping to achieve anything more than preventing Pakistan from making gains in the west which it could use as a bargaining lever for getting back East Bengal. The entire deployment of Indians in the west had a defensive stance.

10. Preparations for war

By end October/early November the Indian Army formations were in their positions and the development of the infrastructure was well on the way. In Tripura, where 4 Corps was poised for the eastern thrust, essential roads and bridges had been effectively improved. A large fleet of hired civilian vehicles was operating day and night, carrying men, materials, rations and ammunition to the assigned places. Development of the routes of ingress involved construction of 358 kilometres of temporary roads and 2,500 metres of bridges and culverts of various designs and spans. It also meant improvement of 600 kilometres of existing roads and strengthening or otherwise improving 2000 metres of bridges of different constructions and designs. While the land mass is a quagmire during the rains, during the dry weather, where there is no water, the soil is firm and takes the vehicular traffic readily. Important bridges were built on some of the major rivers. River Gumti - flowing from bank to bank with an average span of 200 feet - was crossed four times, twice on bridges made with country boats, once on a bridge supported on piers made with piles, and once on a folding boat equipment bridge. In addition there was a Bailey pontoon raft for medium guns and heavy vehicles. Pile bridges were also made on rivers Manu and Saldanadi. At the Corps level the engineers provided 5.5 lakh square feet of accommodation for officers, hospitals, depots of various types, workshops, prisoners of war camps and so on. Most of Tripura has jungles and tortuous low hills, and there are water-logged valleys where rice grows in abundance. But the soil is impervious clay. Whereas there is surface water aplenty upto about 12 feet below the top, beyond that there is just no water for about 1,000 feet. The surface water is generally not potable, and whereever it was not so, deep tube wells had to be dug. Fifteen kilometres of low and high tension electric lines had to be drawn, and there were heli-pads, with or without black top, and

advance landing grounds. Agartala air field was extended with prefabricated steel planks in a matter of a few days to make it suitable for the Air Force fighter planes; from the existing air fields their time over targets was not adequate.

Because of the long and tortuous supply line from Gauhati to Dharmanagar and thence to Agartala, we had problems in transporting the earth-moving plant which we needed the most in the initial stages. Fortunately, there were thousands of people, and these puny, small men, with small-bladed shovels, did wonders. So, while the equipment got dismantled, moved by rail or road, and reassembled, we had an effective substitute. Our sappers belonging to the western and north-western parts of India sometimes showed impatience with the slow but continuous wielding of the shovels and picks by these men, but they soon realised their effectiveness. We had a setback when, during certain days during Durga Puja, a major part of the labour force just grounded their tools, for, they said, they had to pray! There was the enemy and the havoc let loose by him, staring them in the face, but they just would not comprehend that! Puja had to take precedence over every other activity. A large work force of over 10,000 combatant engineer personnel and more than twice that number from the refugee camps, was working ceaselessly, by day, and where possible by night, to get the infrastructure readied. Similar ceaseless activity was in progress in other spheres: positioning of arms, rations, stores, ammunition. And all this was achieved in a matter of 45-odd days.

What I have given is a very brief account of what happened in Tripura. Similar activity was, no doubt, in progress in other operational sectors; for example, northern and western sectors. In the Tripura sector, engineer works had got going around the middle of September; I and my regimental and other unit commanders had arrived around the first week of September, and spent the first couple of weeks in reconnaisance and finalising the engineer plan. Things happened under a lot of pressure and often there were frayed tempers. For example, my works unit commander sounded totally exasperated when the medicals insisted that the hospital to be built for them must be provided with air-conditioned operation theatres;

in a short and swift engagement of the type visualised, such a facility would not have been ready in time to serve the desired purpose. We managed to complete this work just a day or so before the cessation of hostilities, though the place did, all along, serve as an effective staging post for medical casualties being evacuated to Silchar, Gauhati or Calcutta. Towards the end doctors performed surgical operations too, some in the air-conditioned theatres, before the hospital became redundant on account of the steep fall in casualties after the fall of Dacca, and facilities having become available at Dacca itself.

The deep tubewell at the railhead at Dharmanagar was operational by the third week of November, while the one at the Corps Maintenance Area at Teliamura was ready a few days earlier. But these were ready after a lot of ifs and buts. The yield turned out to be 1000 and 1500 gallons per hour respectively. The Command Headquarters at Calcutta told me they were unhappy about the poor yield. In fact I was unhappier, but there was nothing we could do to boost the capacity of the reservoir over a 1000 feet below the surface of the earth. We had, however, dug a number of shallower tube-wells in the valleys, in close vicinity to the existing water courses. Water supply posed no problems for the troops, civilians or refugees, before, during or after the operations.

If the information dissemination process is not up to the mark there can be problems, particularly at a large headquarters like that of corps or army. In this situation the Corps Commander personally saw to it that he maintained an almost continuous personal contact with his heads of arms and services. He was very particular about the presence of the heads at the dinner every evening and there, at the end of the day, we came to know a lot about how things were going. This was followed by a coordination meeting the following morning, where the Corps Commander presided. Thereafter everyone was off to grapple with the day's problems. But there always were small day-to-day issues which Corps staff had to handle, including passing of information or giving directions in regard to any recently cropped-up issues. When properly organised this goes a long way in ensuring smooth and efficient functioning at all levels of staff and support elements. In our case one disadvantage was the lack of a Chief of

Staff; he had stayed behind to command the formations deployed along the Indo-Chinese border.

By the end of October and early November the monsoons were gone. But then came the cyclones, one afer another, till almost the end of November. Every once in a while the sky would clear, and it would warm up, and there would be clouds, and far out in the sea a cyclonic storm would begin to form up, and then break upon us with torrential ferocity. Once the cyclone passed, the rain would cease and the sky would clear, but soon thereafter the next cyclonic storm would start building up. The result of this was that the rivers stayed swollen and the countryside under water till late that year. These frequent and generally unusual cyclonic rains created many problems in the completion of the engineering works.

During Durga Puja when the Hindu refugee labour was busy praying, we tried to recruit Muslims, but even from them the response was not good enough. Somehow they too were involved in performing jobs essential to the festivities. Almost every Bengali believed that working, and not praying, during that period would bring him bad luck. As if they already had not enough of it!

Preliminary Operations

During the latter part of October the Mukti Bahini started taking on definite objectives within East Pakistan, mostly close to the border, generally with the help of the Indians. Though they captured a number of border outposts of the Pakistanis and were required to hold on to these posts, they invariably upstuck the moment the Indian support was withdrawn and/or Pakistanis counter-attacked. But the offensive posture had to be pressed, and the Mukti Bahini and the EBR had to have the feel of the battle. Besides, for some time now, the newspapers and the radio had been talking about the success of the monsoon offensive of the militant Bengalis, and, to lend credence to it, it was necessary to physically have some areas of East Bengal under them.

Along the border, almost due south of Shillong, EB Brigade with two EB battalions and one Indian infantry battalion (5/5 GR; this battalion basically provided the

operational firm base), were asked to secure the border outposts in the Chhatak-Sunamganj area, north of Sylhet. By 13 October the EB had overpowered a few posts by infiltrating behind the defenders. But once regular Pakistani troops arrived the Bengalis lost their grit and determination, and bolted. However, the EBR battalion that attacked the Saldanadi outpost on 18 October, halfway between Agartala and Comilla, gave a better account of themselves. This battalion had managed to infiltrate behind the Pakistani outpost, and held on tenaciously, even though the Indians had to hold their hands all along. It took 33 Baluch of Pakistan's repeated attacks, supported by air, to dislodge this infiltration. The Pakistanis seemed to be determined to see to it that no territory was lost to the militant Bengalis.

At this stage the one problem India faced was coming out in the open in the conduct of hostilities. Although the situation Pakistan had created for India was worse than it could have done during a hot war - it had driven 10 million of its people, a neat 13 per cent of its population, into India - officially the two countries were still at peace and their soldiers could not be fighting one another openly.

Kasba

On 23 October Kasba, a town a few kilometres north of Saldanadi was attacked. The post which was lightly held by a section of Pakistani regulars and a platoon of EPCAF, was easily overpowered. It was counter attacked by the Pakistanis but the EBR personnel held the ground and the attack was repulsed.

Dhalai

During night of 27/28 October, Dhala outpost, north of Kamalpur, was attacked by 1 EBR Battalion. They secured Patharkhola Tea Estate and then a part of Dhalai Tea Garden. On the morning of 29 October, 2 Jat, supported by artillery fire, went in for the border post itself. When the attack had got to about 300 to 500 yards from the objective, the Commanding Officer, on the basis of the intensity of the enemy fire, decided the place was held by a strength of more than a platoon of regulars and a platoon

of Razakars, as was given to him on the basis of the intelligence furnished by Mukti Bahini. To keep the enemy small-arms fire down, more than 1000 rounds of artillery had been fired, but the Commanding Officer was not convinced and called off the attack. This was viewed rather adversely at all levels, and the Battalion was told to put in another attack during the night of 30/31 October.

For the second time the plan was to attack with two companies up. The third company was to establish a stop at the rear of the enemy so as to prevent reinforcements from reaching him. The attack went in during the night but the attacking companies, in spite of the help of EBR guides, lost the way. The stop too did not make it in time, and apparently the enemy reinforced the position during the night, and as the first light appeared, sprayed the attacking column with automatic weapon fire. The attack was almost repulsed when the Brigade Commander tried to influence the situation personally. He got a burst in his leg from an automatic weapon, and fell. The Battalion held on to whatever objective it had secured. Any attempt to push the attack forward attracted heavy fire from the outpost. The attack had, perhaps, headed straight for the killing zone organised by the enemy.

The Jats were counter attacked in the morning, but they held on. This was an immediate counter attack and would not have been mounted had the Jats carried out the exploitation beyond the objective; perhaps for a first venture the battalion was facing too tough a situation. There had been laxity in the fire discipline too, so that by the time they got to the objective they had almost run out of ammunition. Soon they were under heavy enemy artillery fire and under its cover another counter attack started getting built up. Fortunately for them it was called off halfway. The enemy did not know the Jats had run out of ammunition. They had lost heart because they knew a whole Indian brigade was concentrated opposite them. They were always, or almost always, well posted about the Indian strengths and movements. Some elements masquerading around as Mukti Bahini kept them better informed about the Indians, than the Mukti Bahini did about them to the Indians. The counter attack was basically an attempt to shoo the Jats out of the objective by a show of force.

The second battalion of the Brigade put in the attack in the evening of 1 November, and though they captured the remainder of the outpost, the enemy still held out in the built-up area of the tea estate, and the third battalion was told to take that. At first light on 3 November the enemy counter attacked, but not with much conviction, and it was easily beaten back. Thereafter he withdrew out of the area, in broad day-light, without being put to any bother by our troops. He left behind 70 dead while we lost one officer and 50 men. After that, for political reasons, the place was handed over to Mukti Bahini/EB.

The Pakistanis gave a good account of themselves in this engagement, in that a small force of a couple of companies managed to hold almost a brigade of the Indians, for over four days. They were vigilant and kept a close watch on the Indian movements and appeared in strength at the very spot the Indians had decided to go for, bringing down heavy and effective fire. Then, leaving a small contingent to simulate a strong defence, they upstuck the bulk of the force and got it ready to face another Indian attack, from another direction.

Pakistani Defence at the Outposts

I had seen the Pakistanis following the same kind of concept in the Chhamb-Jaurian Sector during the 1965 operations. At the outpost level they had a very aggressive and mobile concept of defence. They maintained a bold close contact with the Indians - sometimes one got the impression that the informer was situated right in the midst of the Indian unit - and managed to surprise them most of the time. At the outposts their defence had no depth, only mobility, and firepower, enough to simulate a strong front in any direction. In fact the total concept of defence as followed by the Pakistanis in East Pakistan was somewhat on these lines: aggression, mobility, firepower, at the cost of depth which in any case was difficult to achieve on account of shortage of manpower and fire support resources. However, such defence is successful only when, firstly, the defender is fully posted of the details of the movements and strength of his opponent and the most likely direction of his attack, and, secondly, the opponent attacks in any case and goes past only after he has reduced the defence. But if he chooses to bypass the

position, the situation becomes radically different. For, though no force can afford to leave strong pockets of enemy on its flanks or behind it, it can afford to ignore weak pockets and reduce them piecemeal, at leisure, later. And this was precisely what the Indians did later in the war. They kept bypassing the centres of resistance, and individually these centres were so weak in strength and firepower, and were so dispersed, that they could not pose a threat of any consequence on the flanks or in the rear of the advancing troops. Bypassed, they were of little military value.

During the Second World War the Germans also bypassed Russian centres of resistance in their bid to make it to Moscow, Leningrad and such other big cities. But the centres were strong and held on till the Germans had been weakened by fighting in the big cities or by the oppressive winters, and then they flared up, with disastrous results for the Germans. In 1812 Napoleon's attack on Russia met with the same fate. But in East Bengal Pakistani troops were hopelessly scattered, were operating in an area where the population was hostile, and there was hardly any hope of reinforcements. Any centres of resistance, whatever there were of them organised by the Pakistanis, were weak and negligible.

At the Hospital

I met the Brigade Commander at the hospital. The last cyclone had played havoc with the thatched accommodation which was meant to serve as wards for the patients. Obliquely-lashing rain had seeped through the bamboo mat walls. In some places the wall matting had ripped apart, giving free ingress to rain water which had gone under the bitumenised hessian spread on the earth floor, and made the floors soggy and pulpy. It was wet and dingy all around. The air was oppressively humid. A party of labourers was working on the drains, but the drying of the place would have to await clear and sunny days. The Brigade Commander was cheerful. He had got a burst from an automatic weapon in his lower leg, and was awaiting immediate evacuation lest his leg got afflicted with gangrene. He said the Jats had done well, considering everything. In the next room of the ward was a Sikh major of the Jats. He too had been hit and was to be evacuated. He

appeared to happy that I met him. He was a proud Jat officer, and said the Battalion had been made to put in an attack with two companies against two companies plus of the enemy at the outpost. He did not agree that originally the enemy had only one platoon, and that he got reinforced during the night following, after the Jats had failed to capture the objectives assigned to them. His view was that the enemy troops could not have occupied the defences in the hours of darkness and then be effective to face the dawn attack. He said that considering that virtually little pre-attack reconnaisance had been permitted, and that the information supplied by the Mukti Bahini had been persistently of doubtful accuracy, and that generally the Indians' intentions and plans got passed on to the enemy with fair speed, the attack should have been with the right strength from the very beginning.

In the other ward were some injured and sick men, mostly from the Jats. I expressed my concern for the mess that the rain had made. They were a bit sullen to begin with, but when they realised that I was no critic of their performance, they cheered up. They had hopes, aspirations, for their 'paltan', the officers themselves. The eyes narrowed a little, in thoughtfulness, and the realisation that it was all over, so soon, when technically the war had not even begun. But they had faith in the future of the 'paltan'. No doubt about that!

Border South of Agartala

On 3 November, Akapara was attacked by EBR backed by the Indians. The place was held by a company-plus of the regulars, Razakars and Rangers. The post was taken, but given up by EBR when it was counter attacked in strength by regular Pakistani troops.

I was asked about the track to Gangasagar, a town east of Agartala, across the border. The intelligence we had compiled indicated that it was fairly all right and could be commissioned after some work. But the Corps Commander wanted me to see the track and give an accurate assessment as the division which was to use this during the operations, had their doubts about its usability. The pilot of the Alouette who was to fly me over the area said the enemy was firing at anything that he saw, including

low-flying aircraft, and therefore, he would not expose himself but for the minimum duration, and I would have to make up my mind during a few such exposures. We went up, and he hovered for a while, and before I could make out whether we were looking into Pak territory or ours, he had plummeted a couple of hundred feet, and was going round and round in small circles. He said he was doing that so the enemy might not take a pot shot at us. By the time he had done this three or four times I was thoroughly sick and nauseated, and requested my friend to urgently put me down on the tarmac of the runway. This he did, to my relief, and to his: he was so worried about getting hit that the whole exercise was totally futile. However, to the Corps Commander I said the air reconnaissance confirmed my earlier impressions about the track.

Cyclonic Weather

On 4 November Pak radio gave a forecast of another cyclone. Ours said it would be fair weather. But on 5 November the cyclone was there. Whatever way they did it, Pak weather forecasts were more accurate than ours. It rained torrentially in the Gumti basin, and whatever bridges we had put up - there were four of them - upon this very important water obstacle, were threatened with being washed away. In that mud and heavy downpour the engineers struggled with the bridges, dismantling what they could, and securing with additional ropes and lashings that which had to stay in water. On 6 November Pak radio said the cyclone had changed course and gone north-east, into Assam. 7 November was a clear day.

Prime Minister at Columbia University

Around this time the Prime Minister, while addressing Columbia University students at New York, said that India could not afford to wait any longer, that the refugees had to go back even if the US and China were to help Pakistan. She said that in spite of India's urgings the world was trying to protect the position of one man - Yahya Khan. Pak radio arrogantly described this as a cry of a woman in distress, because in spite of her best efforts, she had not succeeded in getting the world opinion to roundly condemn Yahya for the happenings in East Bengal.

Belonia

During the night of 5/6 November an Indian infantry brigade with five companies of Mukti Fauj launched an operation to clear the Pakistanis from the Belonia-Fulgazi area. It was a two-pronged attack, an Indian battalion coming in from the east, while the Mukti Fauj closed in from the west. The outposts of Belonia and Parshuram were cleared during the following night, and by 9 November the entire area up to Fulgazi had been secured - 15 Baluch of Pakistan lost 10 as dead and six as prisoners of war. Anoher 30 dead belonged to the para military. Indians lost nine dead.

In the same sector, during the night of 22/23 November, Operation Harvest was launched with a view to trapping the enemy between the forward defence lines and Feni. Two brigades of 23 Division sneaked in from either flank of the Belonia bulge, south of Fulgazi, for this purpose, but though they managed to establish contact between themselves, they failed to trap the enemy; the enemy comprised 15 and 39 Baluch, one battalion EPCAF, 3-4 light tanks, one field battery and one section of mortars. However, this did make the enemy believe Indians were coming from this side for their main attack, and kept this force tied down, thus facilitating 23 Division's operations against Laksham later.

Simultaneously with the attacks on the BOPs, guerilla activities in the interior got stepped up. There were raids on army vehicles, boats, installations and small parties of soldiers. In certain areas guerillas formed themselves into strongholds and from there literally ruled the places around. Pak military was suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with new problems and were forced to disperse down to platoon and section levels. During early November they launched operations to clear guerillas operating astride the Brahmaputra, south of Phylchari, all the way down to Nagarbari, and from the area of Tangail-Mirzapur, and Narsingdi, and, finally, on 17 November, from Dacca itself. This, coupled with border skirmishes, put a heavy strain on the Pak military resources, and in no time resulted in the committing of whatever reserve there might have been for resisting a military invasion from India.

Saldanadi II and other Outposts

Saldanadi railway station, south of Agartala, was captured by EBR on 12 November. An attempt had been made to capture the place on 18 October, but it was lost after the initial capture, to a vigorous Pak counter attack. This time too, the Pakistanis fought with determination. One bunker which had two women inmates, fought the hardest and the longest. The Pakistanis twice counter attacked on 14 November, but without success.

On 13 November (night 12/13 November) 4 EBR Battalion captured Nayanpur, south of Saldanadi. In this engagement 30 Punjab lost 20 dead. Another 30 soldiers dead were from the paramilitary elements. EB Battalion was backed by the Indian 19 Punjab. There were no casualties to own troops.

Karimganj Salient

At Karimganj, the Gauhati-Dharmanagar rail system was vulnerable to the enemy located in the salient, and there had been incidents of sabotage. The task of clearing the salient was given to 59 Brigade (8 Division) under command 1 EB, and two companies each of BSF and Mukti Fauj. One company of engineers was given to assist in the crossing of the Kusiyara river, and clear any mines. Operation Springtime was launched during the night of 20/21 November with 9 Guards and 4/5 GR crossing the river on boats badly paddled by engineers. The enemy held the area with two platoons of 31 Punjab and one company EPCAF and offered only nominal resistance; otherwise such a badly-managed crossing could have ended in a fiasco. Over-cautious Indian and Bengali units managed to ultimately clear the salient by 25 November, and claimed to have captured 117 regulars and irregulars, and killed 56, including two officers; they seemed to have wiped out the entire opposition.

1 EB was then asked to take Kanairghat by 27 November, but they could not till 2 December after the enemy had vacated it.

For the next few days the border was kept alive by successively reducing the outposts. Deception thrusts were made towards Belonia/Feni to induce the Pakistanis to

believe the major thrust was coming towards Feni-Chittagong. There was no major reaction though the Pakistanis resisted spiritedly and gave a good account of their determination to prevent the militant Bengalis from capturing territory inside East Bengal. Normally they gave in only when they were overwhelmed by the numerically superior Indian units. A number of senior Pakistani military commanders continued to stress the need to withdraw in the face of a major Indian attack, to the inner line and hold the fortress-type defences at the pre-selected strong points, but since the Federal government was not prepared to offer territory on a platter to the Bengalis to form an independent government, not much came out of the suggestion. The Government somehow seemed to be confident, notwithstanding the 10 million East Pakistanis in the Indian refugee camps, that India would never go so far in this conflict as to indulge in open hostilities. They had, no doubt, been guided into this thinking by the Indian reactions in the past conflicts, when the Indian leadership had been easily intimidated, or beguiled or neutralised under the loud, menacing threats of the Pakistanis, and the warnings administered by the western world. Russia and the eastern bloc countries had stood by India, but even they had been prepared to go that far and no further; no country was prepared to risk their own interests for India's sake. Besides, the eastern bloc had nourished a hope that one day they would wean Pakistan away from the US and thus have the latter denied the facilities of a military base that the former had been providing ever since its inception in 1947.

Operations in 2 and 33 Corps and 101 Communication Zone Area Sectors

The situation regarding hostilities in other corps sectors was following almost the same pattern as in 4 Corps sector. On the 2 Corps front suitable border outpots held by the Pakistanis and their paramilitary elements were selected and attacked by the Mukti Fauj supported by the Indian BSF and the Indian Army. 42 Infantry Brigade of Indian 9 Infantry Division crossed river Ichhamati at Bayara and attacked Garibpur. In this battle, aircraft and tanks also took part; the latter crossed over a 200 feet-class 40-kilometre bridge which was constructed by the engineers in a matter of three hours. Both sides fought

fiercely, and there were tank and aircraft casualties as well. The place was captured on 22 November. The following day the town of Chaugacha sitting on the northern flank of the important nodal stronghold of Jessore, was also captured.

On 27 November 4 Mountain Division attacked Jibannagar and captured it, and then, advancing north-east, took Andulbaria on 30 November, and Darsana in the north on 2 December. The pressure was maintained and limited thrusts were launched towards Jessore from the west and north-west.

In the 33 Corps sector the East Pakistani salients of Bhurungamri, Patgram, Pachagarh and Bholahat, which jutted into India, had been taken by the Mukti Fauj before 1 November 1971. The Pakistani outposts selected were such as could be taken easily by the Mukti Fauj with minimum support from Indian military or paramilitary units, and which offered scope to deceive the enemy regarding the direction and weight of the main thrusts. Headquarters 6 Mountain Division and 9 Mountain Brigade (of 6 Mountain Division) of this Corps were, however, on 72 hours notice for deployment for operations in Bhutan, if a need for that arose. Artillery resources with both the brigades of the Division (9 and 71 Mountain Brigades) were limited and, therefore, any large-scale operations by any of the two brigades had to be staggered to secure effective concentration of guns.

On 24 November a dawn attack, supported by tanks, was mounted by two battalions of 20 Infantry Division against Hilli, while 71 Infantry Brigade (Indian) captured Boda, south of Pachagarh. No thrusts, however, could be pressed beyond a point as war between the two countries had not so far been declared. In the Mymensingh district troops of 95 Mountain Brigade Group were constantly demonstrating against Kamalpur, a border town west of the road Tura (in India)-Jamalpur (on Brahmaputra in East Pakistan).

Shamshernagar

During the night of 29/30 November, in the 4 Corps sector, 81 Mountain Brigade of 8 Mountain Division, mounted an attack on Shamshernagar, including the air field. Attack

was supported by two troops of armour. 9 EB and elements of Mukti Fauj also took part in this operation, and by 3 December the entire area had been captured. The main reason for taking Shamshernagar was its airfield, which the Air Force wanted, to increase their time over targets. It had been extensively cratered by the Pakistanis but the Indian Army engineers repaired it and made it fit for use in a matter of three days. The Air Force, however, did not use it, for they did not consider it good enough for fighter aircraft.

During the night of 1/2 December the second brigade of the Division, 59 Mountain Brigade, with companies from BSF and Mukti Fauj, mounted an attack from Dharmanagar towards Kalaura. Ghazipur, halfway to Kalaura, was contacted on 2 December, and a road block was established behind it. The defences were attacked at first light on 3 December, and but for the area of the factory, the place was captured by midday, after a fierce fight. One battalion of this Brigade advanced on axis Sagarnal-Juri and made good progress.

The fiercest fighting in 4 Corps sector took place during the attack for the capture of Akhaura-Gangasagar complex, west of Agartala. Here the Pakistanis were well entrenched and in strength, and were determined not to give up any territory.

11. Pak Dilemma and Indian compulsions

So far the Pakistanis had carried out Yahya's instructions and tried resolutely to prevent the Bengalis from securing a large enough enclave within East Pakistan. Militarily they were deficient of resources and inferior in numbers. Even the additional battalions, amongst them 12 and 15 Punjab and 20 AK, had come without heavy weapons, and had been straightaway sucked into the vortex of the security problems at the border and in the hinterlands. Yet they had fought well, in the hope, perhaps, that it was only a temporary phase, that the Indian support to the rebel Bangla elements would in some way be compromised, and, left to themselves, the West Pakistanis would somehow regain control and re-establish the federal authority. Pak radio kept saying the Indian attacks had been held. It gave highly colourful accounts of the performance of the West Pakistani troops, so colourful that not even Pakistanis believed them. Pakistani troops listened to the BBC, or even AIR, to know the correct position. Their senior officers kept on talking of intervention by USA, or China, or of their own secret stab that would send the Indians reeling back to their borders and sue for peace on any terms, i.e. the counter attack in the west!

Otherwise it was fairly clear that Pakistan at this stage was engaged in a totally futile exercise. With resistance stiffening by the day, their casualties mounting by the hour, and no replenishments forthcoming, the end of the crisis was already beginning to be visible, only it was coming into view at the end of a dimension of time, and if Pakistan wanted to avoid that end something had to happen in that interval.

China's military intervention on behalf of Pakistan was fairly ruled out, more so after the Indo-USSR Treaty of Friendship had been signed. For various reasons military intervention by the US was also not visualised, more so

when they had recognised the fact of Pak genocide against the Bengalis and had stopped the supply of military equipment to them. It was recognised, however, that they were concerned about how far the Indians would go in the pursuit of their military aims.

It appears that the options were fairly clear to Yahya. If China or USA did not intervene, he would have to accept Bangla Desh, or get Mujib out of the prison and start political negotiations, at worst accepting autonomy of East Pakistan on the basis of the six points of the Awami League, though at this stage Mujib had been out of the scene for too long and it was doubtful whether he would still possess the capbility to turn the Bengalis to his way of thinking. Bengalis at this stage were not likely to settle for anything less than complete independence. Yahya's friends, particularly the US, had warned him that apart from wrenching East Pakistan, India might try to dismember the western wing as well at the level of the federating provinces. Yahya was thus not taking any chances with the western wing, and was keeping sufficient military strength there with a view to not only holding back any invasion from India, but also taking care of any internal uprising. This precluded any large-scale reinforcement of East Pakistan with troops or weapons. Therefore, what Pakistan had in its eastern wing was barely adequate to combat the insurgency, and if the Indians came in strength it could fight only a delaying action, and hope for some miracle to happen.

And there were influential people, within and without the government, who did not rule out the possibility of that miracle. Bhutto was one. He was a shrewd and calculating politician. At long last he had seen his chance, and, perhaps, the chance for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, and he went for it with full gusto. He claimed strong contacts in USA and China, and assured everyone that he would get them to intervene. The other such person was Tikka. In command of the strike corps in the western wing, he had let it be known that he was commanding a formidable outfit which, when unleashed, would make India regret their decision to take a brush with Pakistan. These two views generally carried the day, laced as they were with the impression that Hindus were generally pacifists and mortally scared of bloodshed and

war. Perhaps the leadership did clearly see the situation and its ultimate end, but were reluctant to give in without a good try.

Indian Compulsions

The 10 million refugees in India posed a serious threat to the Indian economy. But that apart, almost the whole nation rose up in emotional revulsion against the atrocities of the West Pakistanis in their eastern wing. Ethnically and culturally the people of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Eastern U.P. and M.P. are close to the people of East Bengal. Besides, the fact that 8 million out of the 10 million refugees were Hindus, had electrified a majority of Indians. On 31 March 1971 the Indian Parliament passed a resolution expressing sympathy and solidarity with the people of East Bengal in their struggle for the democratic values of life. On 4 April the All India Congress Committee adopted a similar resolution. The formation of Bangla Desh Government had been announced by Major Ziaur Rahman on 27 March, and on 17 April, its Prime Minister, Tajuddin Ahmad issued an appeal from Calcutta, where the Headquarters of the Government were located, to the whole world, for help to fight against Pakistan. West Bengalis were exerting all the pressure on the Central Government for an all-out war. A tremendous pressure came on the Government in April for an immediate attack, and the Prime Minister asked for the views of the Chief of the Army Staff, who, apparently, wanted to go about the business more systematically and deliberately, and did not want to be rushed into the fray with whatever troops he then had available at hand. Besides, the impending monsoons were a strong deterrent; he did not want the Indian Army stuck in a quagmire. Then there was the question of the Chinese in the north. The Indo-USSR Treaty was not signed till August. Perhaps the urgent need for such a treaty emerged only after a comprehensive military appreciation of the situation had been carried out.

So, when were the Indian defence forces to go in? After the middle of November East Bengal would be dry, the first of the snowfalls on the Himalayas would have taken place, and the passes between India and China would have closed, the Mukti Fauj/Bahini/EBR would have been reasonably

equipped and trained to hold their own against the West Pakistani army, and the units of the Indians would have been suitably positioned for the offensive. And, most importantly, the Government needed time to tell the international community how grave the situation was, and why and under what circumstances India would be forced to declare war.

However, the pressure that came on the Government in April 1971 for an immediate attack perhaps had found the Government and its Prime Minister, totally unprepared to face this contingency. No one in the Government appeared to have given a serious thought to the possibility of India getting involved in the happenings in the neighbourhood. Any responsible government would have not only foreseen this but drawn appropriate plans to meet the needs of the time. By the end of March 1971 the tragedy that had befallen East Bengal had hit the whole world in the face, and for the Indian Government to have been caught in stupor, could, in the least, be termed as an act of gross inertia. Otherwise, those who were in contact with the happenings knew that conflict was unavoidable, with millions of refugees pouring into India. Their misery and suffering was of such magnitude as would have put to shame the most frightening descriptions of hell. Bengalis on the Indian side of the border said: war! A large segment of the Indians all over the country favoured the Bengali view. The Indian Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses advised immediate attack, considering the resources Pakistan had deployed in East Bengal. A question that arose now was whether an independent sovereign state could be attacked by another similar state, both members of the UN, just like that. The protagonists of an attack felt that the UN had ceded the right to intercede after it had failed to arrest the Bengali genocide and the movement of the refugees into India. After all, when does a country go to war against another country? It is when it sees its interests irrevocably harmed. There could be many reasons, but the one for which there is no option, is when the interests are being harmed irrevocably. So India could go to war, the protagonists said. And East Pakistan then had around four infantry brigades, almost without support weapons, thoroughly committed to the act of restoring the federal authority, virtually having little capability to resist any Indian incursions of whatever strength. India

had two mountain divisions in Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, and two divisions plus a parabrigade in West Bengal, one division in North Bengal, and at least 30 BSF battalions all around the 3000 kilometres border with East Pakistan.

As K. Subrahmanyam, Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses had said while advocating war, the so-called international norms have never deterred any major power from taking action to safeguard its interests.

It was a fleeting opportunity, available till about the end of April. Thereafter there were the rains, the additionally-inducted Pakistani troops, and the Chinese. Only a government of astute politicians and far-seeing diplomats, supported by a defence gear of high efficiency and rapid deployment capability, could have availed of this opportunity. Once it was lost, there had to be the deliberate approach, months of preparation, expenditure of crores of rupees, suffering to the millions of helpless people, and that much more fighting between the two armed forces.

The pressure continued to mount. During the 4 April meet of the All India Congress Committee some members pressed for the recognition of Bangla Desh, but the Prime Minister counselled patience. Bijay Singh Nahar, Deputy Chief Minister of West Bengal, while voicing public opinion, said that the West Bengal Government recognised Bangla Desh even though the Centre had not done so. It showed the intensity of the Indian feelings on the issue. On 24 May, to assuage the public outcry, the Prime Minister blamed the world powers for dragging their feet, and promised that if something worthwhile was not done, India would go it alone to put the situation right. When pressed, she said that the refugees would be able to go back by the end of the year. It is quite possible that she had set the deadline (of the end of the year) partly on account of the pressure and partly on the basis of the appreciation of the situation by her government. For, an articulate segment of the public was critical of the Government for having let the April opportunity slip by. Even the BSF personnel who had gone into East Bengal during March/April, were reported to have said that East Pakistan lay virtually undefended. There was pressure from the Bangla Desh

government-in-exile, and, finally, even the smugglers and bootleggers operating along the borders, had given the green signal. Critics of the Government felt that the Government was not agile enough to rise to the occasion. They felt strongly about the country coming out poorly after every confrontation, losing territory and self-respect after each incident of hostility.

On 6 July Jaya Prakash Narayan, while addressing the Bihar State Conference on Bangla Desh, said that the country, the Government, and the people would be unworthy if they did not go to war for Bangla Desh. Jaya Prakash was a giant on the Indian political scene, and his views could not have been taken lightly. Again, to assuage the public outcry, the Defence Minister, while addressing a public meeting at Bahula in West Bengal, declared that the refugees would be sent back to Bangla Desh and not East Pakistan.

By mid-November the position was that the USA had all but made up its mind to ask Yahya to relent, and bear pressure upon India to negotiate, although by relenting what Americans understood was the grant of a few more concessions to the Bengalis so that they could be quietened and India put out of the situation. But for India, the stage was set for war. The northern passes were either blocked by snow or were about to be so. After a lot of hard work and persistent efforts, a second opportunity for the offensive had been evolved. Even a charismatic personality like Mrs. Gandhi would have found it difficult to stem the tide. The country wanted war, and it wanted Yahya and his coterie punished for the genocide and brutality, and for forcibly uprooting 10 million people from their homes.

After the escalation of 21 November, almost in all the sectors, the Americans became concerned, and the White House generally agreed with the Pak contention that it had been attacked. There was talk of moving the Security Council, but both the contending parties were not in favour of this: India, because it knew so well the fate of so many issues referred to this august body - it would have amounted to putting the issue in perpetual suspended animation - and Pakistan, for fear of being castigated in the world forum for the genocide and repression it had perpetrated on its own people.

Even after large-scale incursions into East Pakistan, India continued to deny that aggression had been committed. For India needed time to do things, and had the fact of the aggression been officially acknowledged, a number of international groups, including the UN and the Security Council, would have got activated, and exerted strong pressure to abandon the course of war. In any case, these incursions were, at best, only border skirmishes, undertaken mostly to improve the offensive posture, and India believed these could not be put in the category of open warfare. It was merely tightening the screw a bit on Pakistan so that it might still see reason.

The borders of East Pakistan were burning and in this conflagration the extinction of its eastern wing was beginning to be discernible, and birth pangs of the emergence of the independent, sovereign Bangla Desh were beginning to be felt.

War is a difficult game and the commanders and leaders have to take risks. But the likely effects of these risks have to be carefully evaluated, for the price of a reverse can indeed be high; it can unleash forces which can totally change the nation's complexion. One, therefore, cannot blame the leadership, political or military, if they did not feel upto it, when the April opportunity afforded itself.

Akhaura and Gangasagar

The attack on the Akhaura position was launched during the night of 1/2 December by 57 Mountain Division with under command 2 and 11 ERR batallions and two Mukti Fauj companies, supported by a squadron of light armour. All concerned had learned their lessons during the process of reducing the Pakistani BOPs in the preceding three weeks or so. Already there had been frayed tempers at various levels. The performance of the brigades assigned to the process of reducing the BOPs, had come under criticism. The quality of field intelligence had been poor, and the casualties had been higher than expected. The junior commanders complained that enough time had not been allowed for reconnaissance, that intelligence provided by the Bengalis had not been reliable, that the sifting of information by the Indians had been unsatisfactory.

Generally the information brought by the Bengalis was based on casual observations, and was a figment of their imagination. Then the Bengali units had to be part of the assaults across the border to give the impression to the wtching world that it was the Bengali militant who was showing his grit and determination to liberate his country. The commanders at the junior levels said the Bengalis showed neither grit nor determination, and took to their heels at the first indication of opposition. The result was that the attacks did not make it to the assigned objectives either because of a lack of punch, or because the flanks that the Bengalis were supposed to guard, suddenly got exposed. The accusing fingers pointed in different directions. Often there was talk of sacking this or that commander.

The Akhaura-Gangasagar complex was defended by 27 Infantry Brigade of Pakistan, and the Brigade had deployed 12 FF minus one company, plus one company 21 AK Battalion and one company EPCAF to defend Akhaura, and one company of 12 FF and one from paramilitary to defend Gangasagar. The Indian 57 Mountain Division had planned to attack with two brigades: 73 Mountain Brigade was to take Gangasagar first and then join 311 Mountain Brigade in the reduction of Akhaura. 'S'Force, comprising 2 and 11 EB, was to invest Akhaura from the north-east and cut off all riverine approaches to the objective. Care was taken to give these battalions small and manageable objectives. In essence six Indian battalions were pitched against one Pak battalion, but that battalion was entrenched in really well-prepared defences. There were six light tanks supporting the Indian attack, while Pakistan had two light tanks integrated in their defence.

The process of attack started with 11 EB demonstrating along the north-east approach to Akhaura, with vehicles whose silencers were removed to simulate the effect of approaching tanks. This certainly attracted Pak attention, for they had lately dug an anti-tank ditch astride this approach. The 'S' Group captured the Singarbil jetty by 0415 hours on 2 December. The place was counter-attacked by one company of Pakistan, which was repulsed, but not until a company of 19 Rajputana Rif had been brought in to restore the situation.

The six light tanks of the Indians got bogged down in the paddy puddles, and that was the end of the armour support for that phase. The tanks were later pulled out by the engineers with their dozers.

Two battalions of 73 Mountain Brigade approached Gangasagar from south and east, and captured it by 1230 hours on 3 December. The Brigade then exploited up to the main road Comilla-Brahmanbaria and secured all area upto the line of river Titas in the north. In the meantime, 311 Mountain Brigade had opened the attack with one battalion investing Akhaura from the east, another from the south, while one battalion had established stops behind the defences, in the west. The railway station was secured after a stiff fight, by first light on 5 December. Soon thereafter the railway bridge over the Titas was threatened. Since this tended to cut off the only route of withdrawal of the Pakistani forces, they vacated the area and it fell in the forenoon of 5 December. One Pak 105 mm gun was captured in the early part of the operation, while two PT 76 tanks of theirs were taken, in running condition, during the course of the battle. Upto 4 December Pakistan had suffered 50 killed and 140 wounded, while we had suffered 3 officers, 1 JCO and 37 other ranks killed, and 9 officers, 7 JCOs and 140 other ranks wounded. Twenty-four other ranks of ours were missing.

Engineers were on the job as soon as the objectives were taken. Their primary task was to improve the track I had seen during my helicopter reconnaissance.

In the meantime, in a move which totally baffled the frontline Indian officers and men, Yahya ordered the Pak air force in West Pakistan to attack Indian targets in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Rajastan. In the style of the Israeli dawn attack in the June 1967 six-day War, the Pakistani Mirages and Sabres struck pre-emptively at dusk on Friday 3 December 1971, at the Indian air fields at Amritsar, Pathankot, Srinagar, Uttarlai, Faridkot, Ambala, Agra and Jodhpur. The idea appeared to be to immobilise the Indian Air Force on the ground itself, and then, supported by Pak air supremacy, execute a penetrating thrust, capture large territory, and force India to withdraw its support to the Bengalis. At 2030 hours Pakistanis launched a major attack into India in

Chhamb. Pakistan was at war. India could now come out in the open and relentlessly pursue its objectives in East Pakistan. The hide and seek, which had been going on so far, had not only resulted in higher casualties, but caused vexation, frustration and frayed tempers at all levels. The news was received with a sense of relief.

I was concerned about the state of the tracks in the Akhaura-Gangasagar area. The operational plan had a bearing on the tracks being there and in a state as would not impede the pace of advance. An additional engineer regiment from the Corps resources had been allotted to 57 Mountain Division, basically to make sure the Division was not in any way handicapped for want of tracks and bridges. On the morning of 4 December, I drove over to Gangasagar. The Battalion, 14 Guards, had just captured the railway station after a dawn attack, and was in the process of reorganisation. The last few hundred yards to the railway station had no track, and even cross-country movement by my vehicle was not possible. So I decided to walk, just to see how the going was. On the way there was a built-up area, and the silence was eerie, as in a Hollywood western movie just prior to the opening up of fire from all directions. Akhaura was under artillery fire, and the reports of the salvos harshly tore through the morning silence. The houses were double-storeyed, brick-built, oldish, carrying the black moss of the monsoons, and stood in deathly silence. I think I unsettled everyone when I appeared at the railway station. Everyone was feverishly busy, siting their weapons, erecting barricades and defences. The commanding officer said I was the first senior officer to visit the battalion after their successful attack. He narrated how, during the night, his battalion had been held up by a cleverly-sited enemy medium machine gun; it had been simply spewing fire! Lance Naik Albert Ekka of the leading company, taking advantage of the darkness, had crawled up to it, then reached the loophole, grabbed the barrel of the gun, pulled it out, and lobbed a hand grenade inside the bunker. He silenced the gun, but was wounded. The Guards charged forward and, after bitter hand-to-hand fighting, captured the post. But Ekka succumbed to the injuries. For this act of outstanding courage and bravery he was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, the only one awarded in the Eastern Command, and one of the four in the Indian Army,

for the 1971 operations. The commanding officer said his battalion had fought fiercely, but most of the enemy had managed to escape. The battalion had suffered 10 dead and 45 wounded. The prisoners included two Bengali women who cried and lamented so noisily that they had to be released. They were, apparently, kept by the post people, and were fat and ugly, the commanding officer said.

The Pak officer's room had slides and a projector. The slides mostly had scenic views from western countries. Possibly, he was a well-travelled person. The commanding officer kept popping in and out; he was busy with reorganisation. When I said I was going back, he showed concern and said it was not safe, as some enemy could still be lurking around. A JCO just then burst in, his hand raised and the finger pointing in a direction, and yelled at a pitch which was not necessary in spite of the din around: 'Counter Attack!' We all looked in the direction he was pointing, and in the distance saw a few men in uniform. The commanding officer said: 'Put on the mortars! Fire!' In fact that was the direction I had just come from and I told the commanding officer so; the direction happened to be towards India. But he was too preoccupied, and disappeared. A while later he reappeared and said he was worried about my safety. But when I asked him how a counter attack was coming from the direction of India, he looked injured, and again disappeared. The mortar men pooped off with impunity. Then, in spite of the pelting mortars, we saw a man emerge from the midst of dust puffs, waving a white cloth and running towards us. The fire stopped. On approaching the man informed, us to everyone's amusement and his chagrin, that the fire was being directed, though extremely ineffectively, against the sappers who had been deployed for constructing the link road. 'The damned sappers!' the commanding officer swore. 'Always there to beat the pistol!' Then he noticed me and gave a boyish grin.

The link track had to be strengthened with wooden duck boards wherever its alignment passed through water-logged paddy fields. It was extensively used by vehicles and guns during their advance north-west, to Brahmanbaria, till the entire area south of Titas river had been cleared and the regular Akhaura-Ujanisar track had been restored. There was a reinforced concrete bridge at Ujanisar, over

the Titas, on the main Dacca-Chittagong highway, and we could see it while standing at the platform of the Gangasagar railway station. It looked beautiful in the midst of verdant surroundings. Pak guns were deployed in that area, and now and then they fired salvos towards Akhaura, to capture which our troops had already taken the preliminary actions.

Like elsewhere, Pak defences covered all the likely approaches, and they occupied the approach that they were being attacked along, in strength. It needed a very good and bold field intelligence system, and I have hardly ever heard of their being surprised in their defences. During this break-in stage they gave a good account of themselves, and even though outnumbered, they showed tenacity and determination and inflicted casualties, and also took casualties. In place of mines they had made extensive use of panjis which are 30-odd inches long bamboo sticks sharpened at one end, driven into the ground with the sharpened edge inclined towards the direction of attack. It was amusing to see this kind of obstacle. Panjis have some potential to disorganise an attack when they are used in stealth, in the midst of grass or in paddy fields where plants have grown to some height and concealed them, and when the assaulting troops are dressed in shorts, as the British and the Indian troops were during the Second World War in Burma. But out in the open, against troops wearing trousers, they would not serve even as a psychological hazard. This was a Japanese innovation during the Burma operaions, which was picked up by the British and the Indians. Basically this course was adopted only when, on account of logistics, appropriate stores for laying obstacles were not readily available. The Pakistanis obviously had their logistical problems, but they had not sited their panjis to conform to the lie of the ground. I do not think any Indian casualties were attributable to panjis.

On the way back I went past the medical aid post. It was under a tree, almost on the cart track which was being improved by the engineers. The young medical captain was busy attending to the wounded, giving them essential, immediate treatment, and evacuating them to the hospitals in the rear. Most casualties being brought on stretchers seemed to be in great pain. I stood for a while, watching.

Another soldier was brought in, carried on a stretcher by two men. He groaned continuously, loudly. Then, just as they put the stretcher down, the groans ceased, abruptly. The doctor bent over him the next instant and took his hand. Then he upturned his eyelids, and pronounced him dead. I just could not believe it. He was so alive only a few moments earlier.

The sappers were building the road towards Gangasagar, totally unconcerned about how the battle was going. When I told them how they were mistaken for a counter-attacking enemy, the officer was indignant. He had suspected so, he said. That was why he had sent the man. 'But look at the way they fire, sir,' he said good naturedly. 'I do not know how they get the enemy!'

PART II

12. The war

Indian officers and men deployed along the border with East Bengal had felt relieved when, around 1745 hours on 3 December, Yahya cast his thunderbolt. His planes attacked the Indian air fields. It was a full moon night, and the first air attack was followed by a second one. His ground forces opened the offensive by crossing the border at Chhamb at 2030 hours the same evening. Pakistani officers and men in East Bengal felt jubilant when they heard the news. Things would happen now, they shouted from housetops, to the Bengalis, to anyone who would listen. India would buckle. The pressure would ease. The hold of the military regime over East Pakistan would be strengthened.

The Pakistan planners at Rawalpindi also believed this. There still existed a large segment of Punjabis at Rawalpindi who genuinely believed that the vegetable-eating Hindu was basically a baniya and carried the heart of a bird in his rib cage, that he would cave in at the first sound of crackers in his backyard. For that was how he had behaved since the dawn of history! No Indian Army ever ventured outwards in quest of glory, or for spreading the Indian ideology. Perhaps, India as we know it today, never ever existed, as one state. But even then this subcontinent, dominated essentially by trader communities, had people only coming in. No one ever went out of it, for movement inwards was far easier compared to movement outwards; movement adopts the path of least resistance.

Mrs Gandhi was in Calcutta when, on the evening of 3 December, the Pakistani Air Force struck pre-emptively. Perhaps our intelligence had no idea what Pakistan was up to on 3 December, otherwise the Prime Minister should have been in Delhi on that day, unless her priorities were different! However, she was in Delhi after midnight. In a

radio broadcast the following day, she said that the country was on a 'war footing'. While addressing Parliament she regretted that Pakistan had declared war and said that she wanted the two countries to live like good neighbours.

Yahya had selected Poonch and Chhamb for his initial thrusts. Along the rest of the international border he appeared to be generally on the defensive, as it was during the 1965 hostilities. The major part of his forces were deployed in Punjab as he expected the Indian counter-attack to come there, and he had to protect it at all costs. The idea of selecting Jammu and Kashmir for his thrusts was a sound one for, first, he was attacking a 'disputed' territory and this greatly excited the Pakistani Punjabis, and, secondly, any gains made there could be retained or effectively used as bargaining levers. This would not be possible in an area where the borders were internationally recognised. He must have taken into account the possibility of failure, as his predecessor had failed in 1965. Ayub had paid a heavy price. Perhaps for this reason, Yahya was reluctant to declare war. Perhaps he had come out too far, and the pressure upon him had been so intense that he just culd not back out. Perhaps he had hoped that the US or China would protect his interests, for it seems it was fairly clear to him that by itself, Pakistan had little chance of securing a victory against India.

Even in the best of times, war is a dangerous game. Those who lose are disgraced and humiliated, unless they have people looking after their interests in the right places. Even those who win seldom come out unscathed, more so in semi and under-developed countries where the power game assumes perplexingly complex dimensions, and intrigue and subterfuge are the accepted norms in the operating systems. Possibly, the man who inveigled Yahya into such a desperate course of action was Bhutto. He had strong influence in the decision-making echelons in the civil and military circles, and had virtually isolated Yahya and his coterie. He was a master strategist, and was driven by an all-consuming, overpowering ambition. He wanted to rule Pakistan. After President Ayub had taken him as his foreign minister, he had realised what a rival he had taken on his team. He got rid of him after the 1965

Indo-Pak conflict, but within three years Bhutto and his kind had created such conditions that the President was left with no option but to step down; he had lost the support of the army. In came Yahya, but at a time when the anti-martial law elements had a fairly strong hold over the armed forces. Yahya ordered elections. He was not such a godly person who had arrived on the scene merely to hand over power. No one hands over power willingly! Yahya wanted to retain the power which had fallen to his lot quite fortuitously.

He could have manipulated the poll results, but he did not. In both wings of Pakistan the voice in favour of honest, genuine democracy had risen to a shrill pitch, though with separatist overtones. Mujib was prepared to accept him as the President of a federal Pakistan, but Bhutto had no desire to give away the Presidency to anyone other than himself. He had worked for it, and was eager to wear the presidential diadem, irrespective of the cost. The election results, however, made it clear to him that the road to the Presidency was not obstructed by the military alone. The Bengalis were the other serious contenders.

Initially, perhaps, Bhutto had believed that he would get around the Bengalis. But as the events progressed into January and February of 1971, it became increasingly clear that the Bengalis meant business. East Pakistan had more seats in the National Assembly than the West, and all but two of those seats were with the Awami League of Mujibur Rehman. Bengali dominance at the national level could not be wished away. But that was not acceptable to Bhutto who had emerged as the most popular leader in West Pakistan. The opinion in the west was that military domination was preferable to dominance by Bengalis. Bhutto visited Dacca and demanded to be the President, offering prime ministership to Mujib. But this would not have been acceptable to the Awami League. On 28 February 1971 Yahya asked Ahsan, the Governor of East Pakistan, to check with Mujib what the implications would be of a postponement of the meet of the National Assembly. Mujib, apparently, was not averse to the idea as long as a fresh firm date was announced simultaneously. In the event, however, postponement was announced without a fresh date. The events that followed have already been covered earlier in this book.

Towards the last week of November when the Indians had decided to escalate the fighting along the East Bengal border, Yahya and his advisors must have known that India was being provocative, and must have evaluated the risks inherent in declaring a war. They believed that the Indians, at best, would take only a part of East Pakistan, and put the provisional government and the refugees there. The chances of India keeping a standing army in that area till the whole of East Bengal had gone to Bangla Desh - which in effect meant indefinitely - were remote, for pressure from the US, China and the world at large, would make the adoption of such a course prohibitively expensive. And once India was out, what was the meaning of Bangla Desh? It is no easy matter to carve out a second country out of an existing one, not in the present-day conditions! Bangla Desh would perhaps have ended in a pipe dream had Pakistan not declared war.

Bhutto wanted war. If Pakistan won, the kudos would be his. He would be the darling of the masses. But if it lost, the blame would rest squarely on the shoulders of the military leadership. That was how it had happened in 1965. He was the one who, in 1965, had said each Pakistani soldier was equal to 10 of India. He was the one who opposed the cease-fire tooth and nail on 21/22 September 1965, and he was the one who was sacked by Ayub for showing unrealistic bellicosity towards India, whipping up mass hatred with a view to securing gains for himself.

Yahya dithered. He perhaps had thought that India was too big a country for Pakistan to humble. He perhaps had said India had more infantry, more guns, more planes. But Bhutto quoted his China connection and gave assurance that China would collude with Pakistan in the event of open hostilities. He talked of his US connection and assured Yahya that the US would provide air support over East Pakistan by 10 December 1971. Yahya had misgivings about the capability of his strike force, but Bhutto poohpoohed him and confronted him with his generals - with Tikka, the commander of the strike force, in the lead, and Tikka declared, rather pompously, that his force was simply straining at the leash! The ladies of high society, and wives of senior army officers, said the Pak military ought to put on bangles and let the ladies take their place. A kind of clamour was built around the President and it was built so artfully that he failed to see what lay beyond it.

Yahya declared war, and in one stroke did the impossible: he brought into being the new country of Bangla Desh! Tragically, he also affixed his seal upon his certain downfall.

Indians were surprised by the Pakistani pre-emptive air strike on 3 December. Unfortunately for the Pakistanis, the strike made little impact, mostly because Pakistan, being inferior to India in air power, was rather chary of over-exposing itself, for such an exposure could have further accentuated the air disparity and made the west wing vulnerable to decisive land and air action. Indians were taken totally unawares in Chhamb where Pakistan attacked with four infantry brigades supported by an armoured brigade and eight regiments of artillery, or in Punch where the attack was by one Pakistani infantry division, or at Hussainiwala where four Pakistani battalions, appropriately supported, attacked our one battalion guarding the headworks. The state of alertness does not show that India had anything more sanguine in mind than a mere holding role.

Even the fighting pattern suggested how seriously India had taken the Pakistani threats in the west, and how she believed Pakistan had the capacity to bring about what it boasted of. India's only armoured division remained unemployed during the entire operation, for Indians wanted to conserve their armour to combat that blow which might cripple their military capability, or otherwise physically threaten Delhi.

The fact of the matter is that the world in general was simply aghast at the ease with which the Punjabis pulverised the Bengalis and threw them out of their own country into neighbouring India, and the way India was being diffident about doing anything about it. They simply could not believe that India, claiming to be a military force of substantial merit, almost three times the size of the Pakistani military machine, pumping in new equipment worth more than $350 million every year, could procrastinate when the time came, and not react to the events in the neighbouring country where cataclysmic events were taking place and let an opportunity slip by through sheer stupor!

Even the Indians cried out in alarm at what the Government had done, for the Government's inactivity was about to land the country in another **fait accompli** in a situation which was so patently against its interests. Indian leaders had done a commendable job in forcing the British out of the country, but they had been totally out of their depth when it came to handling their own affairs. They lost a large part of the country in the form of East and West Pakistan at the very inception. In 1949 they lost almost half of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1962 they lost a sizable chunk of territory to the Chinese in Ladakh and elsewhere. Was this country the sick man of South Asia, who fell sick barely moments after his birth, and then remained sick all the 23 years of his being? India had five times more human and other resources than Pakistan. In the technical and industrial field it boasted of being the tenth in the world. Its standing defence services were around three times the size of Pakistan's. But what it lacked, perhaps, was the will, the courage, the alertness. It was this concept of predominantly Hindu India that made Yahya remark to Kissinger when, during his mid-July 1971 visit, the latter pointed to the Indian advantage of numbers and resources in the event of breaking out of open hostilities, that his country would get the better of India, notwithstanding the latter's advantages, because of the historic superiority of the Muslim fighter. Kissinger must have been perplexed by the answer, for he had the US experience in Korea and Vietnam at the back of his mind. But Yahya had been perfectly straight in his answer, for he had in mind the Indian performance of the past 23 years. It was not only Yahya who was thinking in that manner. The whole of the Punjabi army and bureaucracy were perspicuously optimistic, and knowingly smiled at each other whenever there was any talk of retaliation by India in East Bengal. They believed that, in one stroke, as it had always been in the past vis-a-vis India, they could administer the final solution to the problem. Ten million Bengalis were out; possibly another 5 million would follow. The numerical superiority of the west wing population was secured. As for the Indian retaliation, it would be taken care of by a power-packed counter-offensive force which would stab India right in its guts, and by Chinese collaboration (Chou-Enlai had said China would not be indifferent if India attacked Pakistan), and by US assurance of economic sanctions against India if it opened hostilities. Pakistanis were sitting pretty, or so they thought, anyway.

The Indian cry of alarm soon turned into a clamour for action. While the states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura groaned under the burden of the refugees, the rest of the country seethed with resentment at the manner in which the Pakistanis hit at Indian sentiments, and perpetrated atrocities on the Bengalis. To minimise the financial burden and to assuage the Indian reaction, the American aid to the refugees was stepped up from $2.5 million to $250 million. Yahya made some facile proposals about proclaiming a new constitution by October end, and resettlement of refugees under US supervision. But India refused to be drawn into this kind of subterfuge, and demanded immediate creation of appropriate conditions for the return of the refugees, and by implication, suggested she would be forced to resort to military action if this was not done. For, a very vocal section of the population in India believed that all misery and suffering on this subcontinent took root when Pakistan was created, and that this misery and suffering would end only after Pakistan had ceased to exist.

A. 4 Corps Operations

South of Agartala, and south of river Gumti, almost opposite Comilla, 23 Mountain Division had concentrated for an attack on the Comilla-Laksham sector. During the night of 3/4 December this formation went in.

The task given to 4 Corps was to capture all area east of rivers Baulai and Meghna, and this involved the capture of Sylhet, Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Dadkandi, Chandpur and Chittagong. For this purpose the Corps had 8 Mountain Division of two mountain brigades and 23 and 57 Mountain Divisions of three mountain brigades each, along with the complement of supporting arms (armour, guns, engineers) and services (to provide administrative support). In addition they were also given eight EBR battalions, the entire lot the EBR had, one 105 mm battery, a GRAD battery of the Bengalis, K Force of two Indian and two EBR battalions, one CRP and one BSF battalion, and other Bengali and Indian paramiliary units, and R Force of one Indian battalion and naval contingent for operations in Cox's Bazar. They also had eight BSF battalions, including one central reserve police battalion, basically to protect the border on the Indian side.

The 4 Corps plan to carry out the task was to attack Sylhet sector with 8 Mountain Division, take Akhaura-Daudkandi with 57 Mountain Division less one brigade, and capture Comilla, Laksham, Chandpur and Feni with 23 Mountain Division plus one brigade from 57 Mountain Division. During actual operations, however, because of the opportunities afforded, the plan got radically altered, and instead of resting content with the capture of the Baulai-Meghna line, which task was to be completed by D°18, the Corps went ahead and captured Dacca and secured an unconditional surrender of the Pakistani armed forces by D°14. For this reason the operations of 4 Corps need to be studied in detail, for it was here that the aspects of mobility, flexibility, maintenance of aim, and, above all, ingenuity and innovation, were demonstrated to the maximum. This Corps scored in the performance of the unexpected and the unconventional, by the manner in which, like the mythical burning arrow, it shot across the mighty river obstacle of the Meghna, which had a wet span running into kilometres, a whole division, with its complement of essential weapons and ammunition, right into the guts of the enemy. But for that, the squabble and harangues for establishing an independent Bangla nation would, perhaps, still have been going on. But for that, even though a lodgement for the refugees and the Bangla Desh Governmet would have been secured, the core of East Pakistan would have continued to exist to challenge the right of the secessionists. It was a remarkable operation, where all elements that constituted 4 Corps, operated in concert and harmony, with classical finesse. Many things could have gone wrong. Thanks to the Corps' style of performance, and the Bengalis' good luck (they deserved it after what they had gone though!), they did not. With a little better central control at the Pak GHQ, this, perhaps, would never have been possible. But it worked. Dacca was assailed. Bangla Desh was formed. At the international level this was a small operation, on a small scale compared to operations that made world history. But to those who took part in it, it was the end of the world!

Defending the land east of the Baulai-Meghna, Pakistan had 14 and 39 Infantry Divisions with headquarters at Dacca and Chandpur respectively. 14 Infantry Division had its tactical headquarters at Brahmanbaria which later moved to Bhairab Bazar, while 39

Infantry Division headquarters was moved to Narainganj in the final stages of the operations. The brigades of these formations were deployed as follows:

14 Infantry Division (Major General Qasi Abdul Majid)

Latu-Kalaura-Shamahernagar-Maulvi Bazar-Srimangal-Shaistaganj	313 Infantry Brigade of two regular battalions
Latu-Charkhai-Sylhet Sunamganj.	202 Infantry Brigade of two regular battalions and Mujahids.
Brahmanbaria-Akhaura-Gangasagar-Saldanadi-Teliapara	27 Infantry Brigade of two regular battalions, and Masud Scouts and EPCAF.

39 Infantry Division (Major General M. Rahim Khan)

Comilla-Maynamati-Chaudagram	117 Infantry Brigade of three regular battalions and EPCAF
Feni	53 Infantry Brigade of two regular battalions and one regular (at Chandpur). This Brigade was given from Dacca where it had a defensive role
Faujdar Hat and approach to Chittagong.	91 Infantry Brigade of two regular companies and Mujahids and EPCAF
Chittagong	97 Infantry Brigade of one commando battalion based at Kaptai, and another regular battalion serving as garrison battalion, and some paramilitary units.

In addition there was a squadron of armour (Chaffee tanks) and two regiments of field guns.

As has been described earlier, 57 Infantry Division attacked Gangasagar with one brigade and with the other it went for Akhaura. By 4 December Gangasagar complex had been captured and the attack was being pressed against Akhaura.

23 Mountain Division

23 Mountain Division opened its attack during the night of 3/4 December. 61 Mountain Brigade ex-57 Mountain Division secured the northern flank of this attack. The plan was to contain Comilla/Maynamati complex and by-pass it from the north with one brigade and capture Chandpur. In the first instance it was the southern thrust which was activated, with all the three brigades of the Division going for the important nodal point of Laksham. For the capture of Laksham the direct central axis was Chaudagram - Parikot - Laksham. 83 Brigade was given this axis. To its north was 301 Mountain Brigade going for Bushchi along tracks Nirbhaypur-Baghmara-Bushchi and Kalijrishna Nagar-Mian Bazar-Kashinagar-Bushchi. They were given a squadron of PT76 tanks. 181 Mountain Brigade was to operate further north and take Laksham along approach Dhanpur-Baghmara-Mudaffarganj.

The major problem the engineers faced in this sector was the development of tracks. In their eagerness to bypass enemy strong points, the Division decided to move the major part of itself, including 301 Mountain Brigade, along a track which meandered all over the country to get to Bushchi and ignored the well-developed roads. The selected track ran through villages, skirting fish ponds and paddy fields, going over and through wet and dry streams and nullahs, and was barely adequate for cycle rikshaws and small carts. It had no capability to take on sustained vehicular traffic without extensive engineer work. From the surprise and deception point of view such a course was desirable, but this should have been weighed against the engineer effort required to develop it if reasonably smooth movement of vehicles carrying supplies and ammunition, guns and returning vehicles bringing casualties, was to be ensured. Besides, even minor

obstacles over tracks in the midst of soft patches in paddy fields, could pose problems which could adversely affect the progress of operations.

However, it was decided not only to put 301 and 181 Brigades on these tracks, but even the artillery brigade, the Divisional Headquarters, and other divisional troops were to move over them; an earlier plan had visualised the entire Division, including its third brigade, operating along them. And, what was worse, this switch was decided barely a couple of days before the start of the operations. We had no first-hand knowledge of the alignments of tracks in the area; even the Mukti Bahini did not seem to have an accurate enough idea. All one could see were a lot of thin, often perplexingly broken, lines on the meter map, indicating tracks of sorts. On the other hand, approach Chaudagram-Parikot-Bushchi-Baghmara was along a good road. On the straight approach (Chaydagram-Laksham) the enemy had a weak battalion. He had already moved a sizeable strength to Feni where he had been expecting a major attack after our action in the Belonia bulge. A direct attack with two brigades on Laksham, with out-flanking of Laksham attempted closer to the main defences, along the better roads, would have been a simpler proposition. As it turned out, the axis through the paddy fields had anti-tank mines, placed, no doubt, after our intentions had become known to the enemy, and upon them three of our tanks blew up. The track was weak and it took an enormous amount of engineer effort to improve it for vehicles. Initial surprise, no doubt, must have been achieved, for a company-plus of 25 FF of Pakistan, who were deployed in this area, surrendered without a fight. But movement was a time-consuming exercise on this track. En route, the enemy had demolished the bridge over the Kakri Nadi, and the engineers just did not have the equipment to bridge the gap. With engineer troops and the labour force which was moving alongside them, they managed to reduce the gap to 60 feet, and then put up the bridge and got the vehicles, tanks and guns moving.

On 6 December, after they had detected the major movement of the Division along the Kashinagar-Bushchi axis, Pakistan conceived a fairly clever plan. The battle had moved westwards, and the ammunition convoy and other administrative vehicles, including a part of the

Divisional Headquarters and some artillery, were at a small forest at Bushchi. Around 1030 hours in the morning the enemy guns opened up wih remarkable accuracy, and caught the Indians in a trap. Even the General Officer Commanding the Division had a narrow escape when one shell landed almost directly on his jonga. A part of the forest caught fire and that created further problems. The track with near-marshy paddy fields on either side thus got effectively blocked. There were heavy casualties; the Officer Commanding 183 Mountain Regiment got killed, 15 to 20 vehicles got burnt, ammunition and petrol exploded and essential stores and equipment were damaged. All movement along this track came to a stop. But the engineers were on the job again and in a matter of less than three hours, with the help of light dozers and duck boards, they had constructed a detour around the forest and fairly restored the flow of traffic.

I travelled on this track on the morning of 7 December. It was in a bad shape and had broken up in many places. The water table in that area was already high - barely a couple of feet below the surface - but in the midst of the paddy fields the situation was worse. It was fortunate that the Division got away so lightly after adopting for its centre line a track that meandered all over the country. This track was adopted by the Division almost at the last minute, and it ate up virtually all our engineer resources in this sector. The advantage derived by the adoption of this course was, at best, questionable. In fact, had the Pakistanis not been in such abject hurry to get into Maynamati cantonment, they could have dealt a blow to the Division to severely affect the pace of subsequent operations.

After the battle had moved beyond Bushchi, it was decided that 301 Mountain Brigade would go straight for Chandpur, without waiting for the fall of Laksham; they had taken so long to get to Bushchi with hardly any opposition en route! Pakistan held strong positions at Lalmai Hills and Laksham, on either flank of the proposed Brigade thrust. From Bushchi to get to the Comilla-Chandpur road the passage was via Baghmara, which was dominated by the Pakistanis from the Lalmai Hills. There was, however, one indifferent track from Bushchi, via Bhora, to Ghazipur on the Chandpur road. At Bhora this

track went over the Dakatia nullah over a weak wooden bridge. With ingenuity and improvisation the engineers produced a 7-kilometre track for this brigade almost with the same speed as that of its marching infantry, enabling the support weapons and vehicles to cover the advance effectively. By 7 December, the Brigade was at Mudaarganj, cutting off the Laksham garrison from Chandpur. The enemy counter-attacked at Mudafarganj but the attack was repulsed. Luckily it came after the armour had got inducted into the area. Pakistan garrison at Laksham, which had got reinforced by the elements withdrawing from Feni, but which got cut off from Chandpur at Mudafargank, and Lalmai at Baghmara, were now in a bit of a jam.

83 Brigade attacked the Chaudagram during the night of 3/4 December and took it. The Pakistanis were caught between the attackers and the stops established behind them, and suffered heavy casualties. Thereafter they offered no further serious resistance. At Parikot they had demolished the bridge over the Dakatia river. Infantry assaulted across the obstacle while the engineers put up a folding boat equipment bridge of 140-foot span, for the following-up echelons. The crossing as such was unopposed. Engineers also lifted some mines from the crossing site. Defences at Laksham were contacted during the night of 6/7 December, along this direct and well-developed approach.

The third brigade, 181, followed 301 Brigade and established stops west and north of Laksham, and that made the Pakistanis at Laksham very nervous. On 7 December their Divisional Commander travelled from his headquarters at Chandpur to the Headquarters of 53 Brigade at Laksham, for urgent consultations. At Mudafarganj he and his party ran straight into the Indians and got involved almost in a running fight. But the party managed to get out, and went back to Chandpur. The Divisional Commander gave an appraisal of the situation to Dacca and sought permission to withdraw. He was told to move back to Narainganj. But, on 8 December, the boat carrying him and his Headquarters, was hit by the IAF and he was wounded. He later took a helicopter and escaped to Burma just before the surrender.

Pak 53 Infantry Brigade at Laksham, comprising 21 Pak-ocupied Kashmir Battalion (POK) and 15 and 39 Baluch and

some irregulars, took a last-minute decision on 7 December, to vacate Laksham and make for Chandpur. When their 21 POK arrived at Hajiganj they found the withdrawal route already blocked by 1/11 Gorkha Rifles of 301 Mountain Brigade. After a brief but spirited fight the troops in contact, the Battalion Headquarters and two companies, surrendered. The remaining Battalion escaped back to Laksham, but not before they had suffered heavy casualties. During this time some engineer troops, who were developing the Bhora-Ghazipur track, came in the way of these escaping Pakistanis, and were fired upon. Here the engineers suffered their worst casualties of this war. Had they been more circumspect and alert, they could have avoided this unnecessary loss of life.

During the night of 8/9 December 15 Baluch-21 POK, having been written off - along with the Brigade Headquarters - made another attempt to get out of the net Indians had cast around them, this time towards Maynamati. To help them sneak out of the place 39 Baluch simulated an intact front with their fire. The ruse worked and the Pakistanis managed to slip past, almost unmolested. Later in the night 39 Baluch followed the earlier column, but they were not so lucky, and got caught in the Temple Hill defences on the southern edge of the Lalmai Hills, and suffered heavy casualties before they ultimately managed to reach Maynamati.

Earlier, on 7 December, information had been received that Comilla was lying vacant. The Divisional Headquarters ordered 14 Jat, ex-301 Mountain Brigade, around 0830 hours, to take the town; the Battalion was to operate under the orders of the Divisional Headquarters. The Battalion was then in the general area Majlispur-Pipulia, and moved north on manpack basis - it had no option as no suitable road system was extant in the area - and marched around for almost ten hours before getting to the area of Comilla airfield, in the process covering around 15 to 20 kilometres. They fought light actions at Gazaria and Lakshmipur. By the time the airfield was reached it was almost dark. But the place had virtually been abandoned. There was no worthwhile resistance encountered while entering Comilla as well, which was done during the same night. The enemy suffered some casualties, mostly in independent detachments who had not received the

withdrawal instructions and had no information about the progress of 14 Jat, and were surprised in their defences by the unexpected appearance of the Indians. On 8 December the Army and the Corps Commanders landed at Comilla to the heartfelt cheers of the locals. Pakistan had offered little resistance. Their defences in this area were based on Lalmai and Maynamati. The latter was one of their major cantonments and had been organised to serve as one of their strong points. They barely had troops to defend Maynamati. Therefore, Comilla, its airfield, and areas east and south of it, were held lightly. After the appearance of 61 Mountain Brigade on the northern flank of Maynamati, Pakistan's defence of Comilla was simply out of the question. They had, however, damaged the bridge on the direct road from the Indian town of Sonamura and laid some mines on the way; this was the shortest approach from the Indian side, to Comilla. The engineers repaired the bridge and removed the mines in a couple of hours, and restored communications.

301 Mountain Brigade had encountered enemy opposition at Mudafarganj on 7 December. On 8 December they had a spirited fight with the enemy at Hajiganj. The Corps Headquarters, however, were of the view that they were somewhat over-cautious in their advance, and the Corps Commander personally visited them on 9 December to prod them to move faster, informing them that Chandpur had been all but vacated by the enemy. 3 Kumaon and the squadron of armour, thereupon charged forward helter skelter, and entered Chandpur by 1100 hours on 9 December. They moved almost like a mob, and fortunately for them the place had been totally vacated, otherwise the consequences of such a disorganised move could have been unfavourable. The idea of following the Pakistanis to Narayanganj was considered but dropped, as adequate rivercraft for the purpose was not available. Chandpur is a major river port on the Meghna, on way to Dacca (Narayanganj).

On 9 December Laksham had no Pakistanis and the Indians, after having hovered around it for two days and more, just walked in. At this stage, 83 Mountain Birgade was ordered to reinforce the thrust of K Force towards Chittagong.

23 Mountain division went in during the night of 3/4 December and made it to Chandpur only by the forenoon of 9

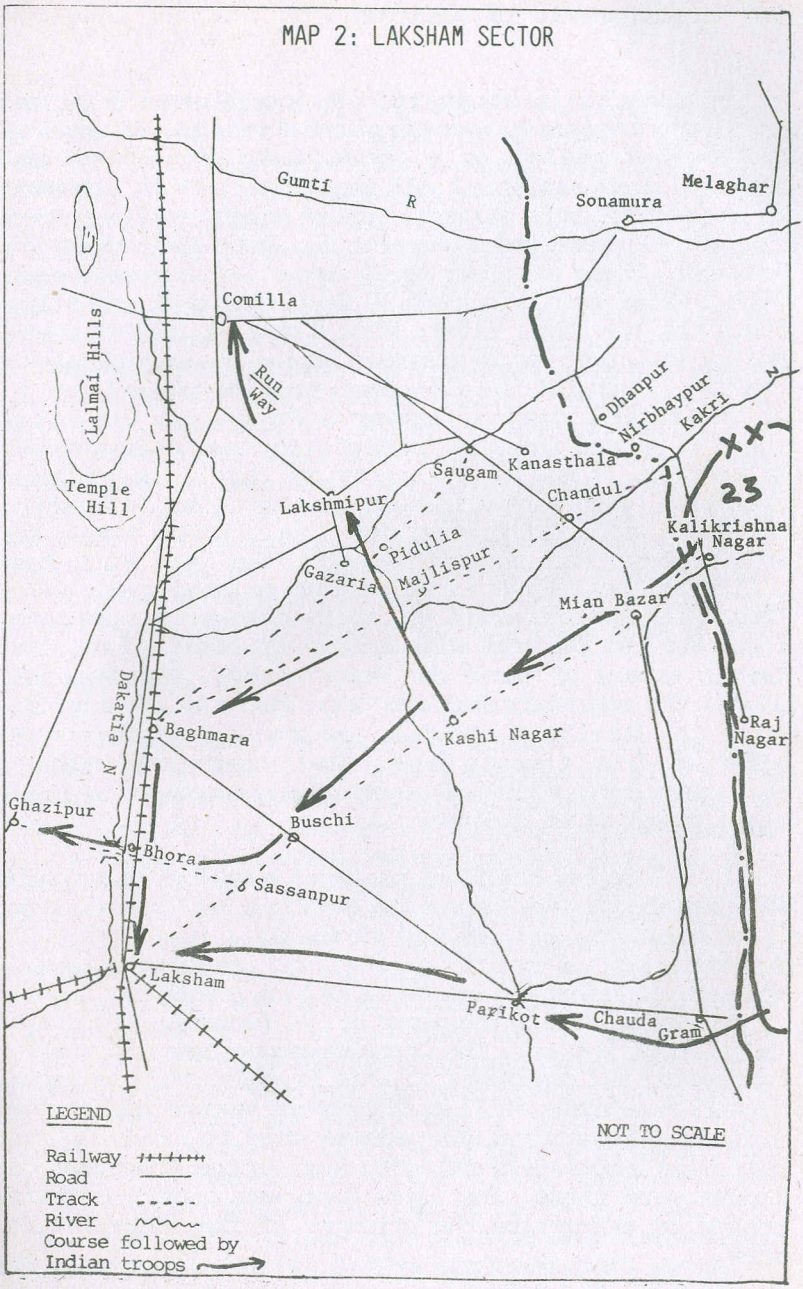
December, covering a distance of about 90 kilometres. Against it there were two scattered regular battalions and some irregulars. Pakistan Air Force had been finished; it hardly came in the picture against this formation. Their artillery strength was inconsequential. They had no armour. Our side had everything: air power, armour, guns - medium, field, light, and mortars. But the Division was operating along such indifferent tracks that it partly compromised the advantage of its superior fire support. Then its vehicle columns were getting stuck too often in the soft ground through which the tracks ran, and, consequently, it was operating, often, on manpack basis. It was a matter of great credit to the engineers that they, in spite of having been told at the last minute about the switch in the plans, put up a Herculean effort and produced fantastic results, converting tracks barely fit enough for bicycle rikshaws, into roads capable of taking heavy vehicles and medium guns, in a matter of hours. In the process they ran out of equipment, and a stage did come when equipment bridges had to be dismantled in the rear to strengthen/construct new ones in front.

The plan in this sector had emerged as a result of too much caution, and seeing too much enemy at too many places, without rational regard to his resources, deployment capability, and our own overwhelming strength. Perhaps this was the result of the setback the Indians had experienced at Hilly, in 33 Corps sector.

61 Mountain Brigade

61 Mountain Brigade of 57 Division had been placed under the command of 23 Division. It was to initially protect the northern flank of 23 Division's attack which opened during the night of 3/4 December. Thereafter it was to concentrate in the general area of Rajapur, and then go for Burichang, then cross the Gumti, and contain Maynamati from the north and west. Here too there had been a switch in the plans. The advance to Daudkandi was to be done by the remaining two brigades of 57 Division, but these brigades were diverted to capture Brahmanbaria and Ashuganj, and the task of taking Daudkandi was given up. It so happened that on 9 December Daudkandi was undefended, and a battalion of 61 Brigade was asked to take it.

MAP 2: LAKSHAM SECTOR



This was basically an engineer operation as there was hardly any enemy east or north of the Gumti; the Pakistanis had boxed themselves up in the Maynamati cantonment and appeared quite satisfied with that. The tracks which were to be used for this operation could barely take a loaded rikshaw and were under water till about the middle of November. There were two water obstacles en route, each with a water span of around 60 feet. And then, finally, there was the Gumti river, with a wet gap of 160 feet. Bailey equipment was required to bridge the smaller gaps. The total length of the alignment, from the take-off point on the Dacca-Chittagong highway at Rajapur, to the point where it joined the Comilla-Daudkandi road, was over 30 kilometres. It was a very tricky and difficult engineer operation, much more difficult than the track to Buschi. But there was a difference. The plan had been finalised well before the operations, and the engineers had collected the relavent information in good time, made their plan and rehearsed it, so that when the time came they executed the work with aplomb and achieved results far in excess of their own expectations. Besides, all along, the engineers had been kept fully in the picture about the details of the plan and any changes that were effected from time to time. Then there was another difference too, on this approach: there was practically no enemy guarding or defending it.

By 5 December the flank protection task of 61 Brigade was over and they were given the go-ahead for 0500 hours on 6 December. The Brigade had virtually a free run. By 7 December they had gone across the Gumti, on manpack basis, and secured Jafarganj and Chandina; the latter is due west of Maynamati. During the night of 7/8 December, 12 Kumaon captured Elliotganj. The Corps Commander was personally overseeing all movements of this Brigade. On 9 December when 12 Kumaon was still at Elliotganj he came back to the Brigade Headquarters and ordered them to rush up the battalion immediately and capture it. By the afternoon our troops were there. The impression was that the units tended to exaggerate the strength of the enemy facing them.

While flying over the Meghna, the Corps Commander and his pilot had not noticed a gun-boat lurking in the midst of a lot of rivercraft. Suddenly it opened fire. A bullet

grazed the tip of the Corps Commander's nose and the middle of his forehead. He escaped fatal injury by a few millimetres. Another bullet wounded the pilot who, however, showed remarkable presence of mind, and very competently manoeuvred the aircraft out of the hail of bullets. After receiving first aid, the Corps Commander was back on the job, still closely overseeing the functioning of 61 Brigade. On 10 December the Brigade was worried, for Maynamati not only had what was originally earmarked by the Pakistan for the Comilla sector, that is 117 Infantry Brigade of three infantry battalions plus, but also elements of 53 Infantry Brigade withdrawn from Feni, Belonia and Laksham. And this total force was almost intact, and concentrated. When the Indians opened their attack, the Pakistanis had the advantage of being concentrated against an adversary who was stretched and scattered. Now the situation had almost reversed. But there was a difference: we had an air force who were the rulers of the sky! And then, we had numerical superiority!

The Air Force

On 3 December when Pak Air Force struck, Pearl Harbour-style, with a view to inflicting a crippling blow to the Indians, they had around 20 Sabre jet fighters (F-86) in the eastern wing against seven fighter and fighter bomber squadrons of India, which included two MIG-21 and one SU-7 squadrons. On the western front Pakistan had around 11 squadrons which included Sabres, MIG-19s (Chinese built), French Mirages and B-57 US bombers, against around 28 squadrons of India. In the face of such superiority, for Pakistan to have opened hostilities with an air attack in the west appeared foolhardy, more so when it was known that troops on either side had moved to their respective battle locations and the complete war machine was already on the alert; they could not have hoped to catch the Indians napping. It appeared to be a kind of gamble. On the Jessore front on 22 November, Pakistan Air Force had come to the aid of ground forces, and had lost three of their aircraft. Then some engagements had taken place between them and our Air Force, and this had further depleted their strength. By 5 December the talk was that Pakistan, in the eastern wing, had only three aircraft left to do any fighting. During 3/4 December, and subsequent nights, Dacca was attacked. The Pakistanis fired their anti-aircraft guns

indiscriminately-they had around 50 guns - and kept the fireworks show on almost the whole night. Later, however, their fire discipline improved. The Indians started bombing the city by night with bombs dropped off Caraibous. On 6 December a massive attack was mounted by the IAF on the twin airfields of Dacca, one at Kurmitola and the other at Tazgaon, and the runways were effectively cratered, rendering them unfit for any further usage. This was the end of the Pakistan Air Force in East Pakistan. They made an urgent attempt to repair the Tezgaon airfield and had done a fair amount of the job, when the IAF bombed it again on 10 December, and more craters were made. Thereafter no further repair work was undertaken. Around 10 fixed-wing aircraft were there at the Tezgaon airfield at the time of the attack, and these stayed there, immobilised for want of a runway, till they were taken over by the Bengalis after the war.

IAF ruled the skies over Bengal and Tripura, and that made a decisive difference in the outcome of the operations. Maynamati was bursting at the seams. It had around five battalions defending it, with some support element, and they were being contained by two battalions of 61 Brigade. After the capture of Chandpur on 9 December, 181 Brigade of 23 Division, 1 EBR and the armoured squadron, were also put on the task of reducing Maynamati. But the last word was with the Air Force. The enemy was constantly under observation and any move by him instantly attracted aerial retaliation, with rockets, bombs, napalm. The Air Force had planned to provide around 120 sorties per day to the three corps and the 101 Area, but in fact they provided much more. In 4 Corps sector alone they were providing 50 to 60 sorties per day. And this air effort discouraged the Pakistanis gathered in the various strong points, from trying to break out towards Dacca, if such a move was ever contemplated, or venturing out of the strong points to attack the Indian units and formations which were fairly scattered over the countryside at this stage. The course of history would undoubtedly have been altered had the Pakistanis withdrawn to the inner perimeter defended by the great rivers Jamuna, Ganga and Meghna, and fought from there.

The Pakistanis had been effectively restrained by the IAF. The lesson learnt by Headquarters 39 Infantry

Division when, on 8 December, along with its administrative elements, it was moving by river, in broad daylight, from Chandpur to Narayanganj, and was attacked by the Indian planes, had been assimilated by others as well. The Air Force had sunk the major portion of the Narayanganj-bound fleet. Even the General commanding the Division had been wounded in the process. In support of the ground forces, the Air Force softened the enemy positions, engaged his movements, concentrations of troops and vehicles and destroyed his dumps, gun-boats and whatever assets he could deploy in support of his operations. Napalm bombs were used against his strong points. One-thousand-pound bombs were dropped from the Caraibous. Mastery in the sky was one major factor that had a bearing on the speed of events at that point of time.

57 Mountain Division

I left the account of 57 Division when, on 4 December, its 73 Brigade had, with 14 Guards, captured Gangasagar, and 311 Brigade had invested Akhaura with one EBR battalion demonstrating from the north, from Singarbil. Akhaura was a well-developed position, defended by three companies of 12 FF and some irregulars. A whole 311 Brigade got down to capture it. An additional battalion from 301 Brigade had also been earmarked for the purpose, as also 12 Kumaon from 61 Brigade. However, Akhaura had been effectively surrounded with stops in the north, south and west of it. By 0630 hours on 5 December, 18 Rajput ex-301 Mountain Brigade had captured the railway station, and by 0730 hours the defensive position had been totally vacated by the enemy and he had withdrawn towards Brahmanbaria. This he did after the railway bridge behind him, on the Titas river, his only escape route upon which Indians had not been able to put any stop, had been threatened by 4 Guards.

During the currency of this operation, Pak air was still alive, though comprising only a few aircraft, which had had showed up on 2 December when three of their Sabres had attacked the Indian positions west of Agartala. On 5 December Akhaura was taken, but the enemy had escaped. He had suffered casualties; a prisoner said the enemy had around 50 dead, against 40 of ours, which included three officers, and around 140 wounded against an equal number

on our side. There had been a fierce dogfight, albeit at brigade/battalion level. But the aim of the Indian commanders, that of capturing the whole force in the area, could not be achieved. So close to each other were the pursuers and the pursued, that the latter did not get time even to demolish the rail bridge, and it was captured intact. A fresh appraisal of the situation was carried out at this stage, and a major switch in the plan was decided upon.

A squadron of tanks had been allotted to support the Akhaura operation. To conceal the direction of their attack the EBR battalion had demonstrated from the north, the direction from which the enemy were expecting the attack and where they had dug an anti-tank ditch, by revving up vehicle engines with silencers removed. At the appointed time on 2 December, the armour sallied forth, ready to go for the guts of the enemy, only to get bogged down in paddy fields a few hundred yards later. They were pulled out of this sad predicament by the dozers of the engineers, and were out of the Akhaura battle. Even in 23 Division the armour had met with a similar fate. There was need, in this case, for the formations to consult their engineers more closely, evolve suitable tactics for the operation of armour in riverine terrain, and then train with a view to achieving effectiveness. Since none of these aspects were covered prior to the start of hostilities, full advantage of the availability of armour was not derived.

The original plan for 57 Division was to build on 61 Mountain Brigade (the Division's third brigade) after the capture of Akhaura, and bypassing Maynamati, to capture Daudkandi. The change in the plan was made because it was estimated that Pakistan 27 Infantry Brigade had escaped almost intact, and could pose a flank threat against the operations of 57 Division against Daudkandi, from Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj. Such a threat could become all the more serious if this Brigade was reinforced by the Pakistan military formations operating in the Sylhet Sector - they had two brigades there comprising four regular battalions, and plenty of paramilitary forces. Originally the two mountain divisions were to operate along mutually supporting axes, being Maynamati-Daudkandi and Laksham-Chandpur, with capability to switch

guns, and use air on a narrow frontage. The northern flank of this thrust was considered protected by river Titas and troops were deployed alongside it. But now this protection was not considered to be good enough, and it was thought that something more substantial was required to be done in this regard. Such a concentration of the enemy, on the flank of the main thrust of the Corps, could unbalance it. Besides, it could effectively thwart Indian designs, if they had any at this stage, for the capture of Dacca or, at least, making a show of it to boost up the Mukti Bahini activities in the inner triangle.

The original plan was that while the Indian Army would engage the Pakistan troops at the border, Mukti Bahini guerillas and regular Bengali units would spread into the country and seize the government. But by the end of the monsoon offensive it was clear that the Bengali militants just did not possess that capability; they were too raw in the game. They were not skilled enough to take on even the Pakistan irregulars, or the administrative units located in the rear. In fact, they could not take on even the Pakistan police. With more experience they might perhaps have developed the capability, but that would have taken time, and time was at a great premium. The planners then decided to go as far as the line of the major rivers, and leave the innermost Dacca triangle to the Mukti Bahini. But the impression gathered after seeing the Mukti Bahini performance during the September-November actions, was that even the inner triangle would have to be taken by the Indian Army for the Bengalis, considering the time. Besides, the task given to the Corps was the capture of all territory east of the line of the rivers Meghna and Baulai, and with all territory north of Titas, almost up to the south of Sylhet, still in Pakistan hands, it could not be claimed that the task had been completed. At the time of planning the Indians had, perhaps, expected to round up the entire Pak force operating south of Titas, opposite Agartala. Unfortunately, they could not.

On 5 December I was told that there would be a switch, and the Corps Commander told me at night, in the mess, to go over to Akhaura and oversee the crossing of Titas by 57 Division. I was at Akhaura by 1030 hours the following morning. The battalion which had fought there was still in the process of gathering its dead. Some 20-odd bodies had

been put in a heap and a few men sat around them, eating the langar-cooked food. A few crows on the trees around descended now and then to peck at the closed eyes or mouths of the dead. The men ate on, not talking, not concerned about the crows, too absorbed in eating. I asked them about the disposal of the bodies. No one replied. I pointedly addressed one of the soldiers. Without looking at me, he said, mechanically, that arrangements for their disposal were under way. On the narrow grassy track between fields of paddy, I passed a rashly driven Jonga of the Guards which nearly knocked down my vehicle. Annoyed, I asked the vehicle to stop and admonished the officer sitting beside the driver. He had a fairly glazed look, as if he had not slept for some time. He said he was sorry, that he would keep the driver in check. The driver sat on at the wheel, his insolence all too evident. I left them, not too happy over the incident.

We drove to the crossing site. There were any number of army vehicles on the road. A railway line ran alongside it. There were blocks of traffic trying to move both ways, overtaking, reversing: a worse confusion I could not have imagined. Nothing moved. The drivers slept in their vehicles. We wended our way with a lot of difficulty, shouting at the military police personnel who were totally ineffective, fighting with other vehicle drivers when they obstructed or sought priority over us. The crossing site was one big muddle. There were hundreds of men, scores of vehicles, a few armoured vehicles, any amount of important equipment, including some light guns, scattered about over a few hundred yards which had been earmarked for the crossing site. The railway bridge to the right of the crossing, which had been captured intact, was so narrow that it was incapable of taking any vehicular traffic even if we had decked it.

But there was no engineer activity in sight when such activity ought to have been most pronounced on an occasion like this. On 6 December, this very day, mercifully, our Air Force had put the Pakistan Air Force out of the contest by knocking out the two airfields near Dacca. Otherwise, the fate of such an ill-planned and ill-executed operation could have been sad, and 57 Division could have been badly crippled. It can be argued that Pakistan never possessed a worthwhile air strike power in the eastern wing, even if

its remnants had not been grounded on account of the bombing of the runways. But that is no excuse for executing a river-crossing operation so shoddily.

I met the officer commanding the engineer regiment. I had asked him to provide engineer support to the Division, in addition to the support provided by its integrated engineer regiment. He had arrived with an odd officer and a few men, and had not been able to contact any staff or engineer officer of the Division. The commander of the Divisional Engineers had charged off in hot pursuit of his bridging equipment, carried in 15 or 20 vehicles, which had got lost in the melee. A couple of his officers, junior commissioned officers, and a few men were around, supervising some country boats on which some men and equipment were being put across. The wet span of the river was around 150 feet. Men and things were scattered about on the bank of the river as if they were at a kumbh mela.

Around 1400 hours or so I was informed that the officer commanding the divisional engineers had arrived and was having lunch. That kind of news was somewhat disconcerting, more so when none of us had eaten till then. However, we decided to call on him immediately and find out how things were. He told us he was having a hurried bite, and then he was coming over to us anyway. No, he had not been able to get anywhere, and had all along been stuck in a jumble of traffic only a few hundred yards away. He had managed to emerge from that traffic jam only after hours of yelling and shouting till his lungs ached. So he munched on, not talking too much, often being respectfully monosyllabic, while I looked on in bewilderment, not knowing whether to sympathise with him for the hard lot that had befallen him (organising a crossing is basically a staff function) or admonish him for the poor manner in which he had planned and organised a simple bridging-cum-rafting operation across a mere 150 feet-odd water channel. To compound the situation, we learnt that the officer had, in fact, helped himself to nearly all of what the two of us had brought along as our midday meal. He said he was sorry; he had thought that he was being served by his own messing detachment and was taking his own share. Where was his detachment, we enquired expectantly, hoping to partake of his share which must have been kept for him - he was the commanding officer, after all! He said the

detachment too was lost in the melee, and no one had been successful in locating it so far.

Then a few bridging vehicles managed to arrive along with some personnel of the divisional engineer regiment. All faces lit up expectantly. Two vehicles which had boats, were immediately brought to the water line, and unloaded, and the boats were stretched to shape and put in water. One after the other the boats turned out to be leaking and were unfit for operational use. This indeed was exasperating.

By late afternoon six rafts and three pairs of jetties had been constructed, on captive ferry basis, after the boats had been repaired; luckily repair patches were available close at hand. Soon vehicles and equipment, strewn about along the bank of the river, started crossing. The engineer regiment which had been earmarked to supplement the divisional engineer effort, was given the task of developing the roads and construction of bridges north of the Titas, right upto the Meghna.

I arrived at the Corps Headquarters by nightfall, and appraised the Corps Commander of the situation. Then there were orders and counter orders for bridging this or that gap, or developing this or that track. I was just too tired, and went to my **basha** and went to sleep.

The following morning, 7 December, the Corps Commander told me that the Agartala airfield had to be immediately extended to enable Gnats and Hunters to operate from there. Otherwise, he said, they were not getting enough time over the targets. I was not to bother very much about the stores or troops, for the command Chief Engineer had already despatched the stores on white-hot priority by rail, and had earmarked a company of the Border Roads, who were nominally under me but were getting their orders from the Command directly (I had nothing against this arrangement), for this task. But I was told to make sure that the task of extension by 400 yards took the minimum time. I wondered why the Air Force could not have foreseen this earlier; the operations were under planning since May 1971. The Air Force had asked for the Shamshernagar airfield in a hurry, and we had to strive hard to meet their requirement. When the runway had been

repaired they said they did not need it as it was not long enough for their aircraft. Instead they wanted electric lines drawn up at top speed to install some radar stations. After that had been accomplished they had no radars to install. Then they wanted to install an elaborate communications network centre to render effective support to ground forces. But they had no generators. So we had to part with a reserve generator that we were holding for the hospital. Barely had the runway extension demand been received, than they put in a demand for blast pens and other shelters around the Tripura airfield. These were big demands and required time and resources. Why could these not be projected in good time, when the infrastructure was being developed?

Nothing came of the white-hot priority of the Command chief engineer for the despatch of stores for the extension of the runway, the main item being the pierced steel planking. So I used up whatever reserves I held and we completed the job in seven days, working day and night. The Air Force continued using the airfield while the runway was being extended; the extension was basically a safety measure, to take care of the overshoots.

On 8 December the officer commanding the Tactical Air Command with the Corps Headquarters flew me out in a helicopter to the Agartala airfield where the runway was being extended. The Border Roads detachment which had been assigned the task, had received the steel planking that I had released from my reserves, and their men were working with quite a show of enthusiasm. I spent some time at the site, suggested some changes in the workforce organisation, passed orders regarding additional stores and implements required, and checked the arrangements for working during the night. Then I left for Kasba, a town south of Agartala, where the Indian road system was being connected with the Bengali road system. The work on the bridges was slow and I was unhappy about it. The Divisional Engineers had not shown sufficient zest in carrying out the task. I left a liaison officer behind to chase and speed up matters.

Then we were on the Chittagong-Bhairab Bazar-Dacca trunk route called C&B Road, 'C' standing for China and 'B' for Bengal. The road apparently had been designed and

supervised by the Chinese. It was a fairly good road, of 12 feet carriageway, and 9 feet grassy berms on either side. The quality of bituminous work was high, but in spite of its being on embankments for most of the way, it had corrugated badly over many stretches, substantially cutting down the driving speed. Bunkers and pillboxes had been made in road embankments every now and then; perhaps these were more for feightening the local population than for actual use during a war with India. Or, perhaps they were there to cater to some remote contingencies, during counter-insurgency. Otherwise Pakistan had neither the troops nor the resources to man defences on such an extensive scale.

Beyond Ujanisar the road was really bad. The Engineer Regiment which had augmented the engineer force with the Division, was working hard to see that the Divisional vehicles and guns got through without delay. The reinforced concrete bridge over the Titas had been destroyed earlier by the Mukti Bahini, and Pakistan army engineers had constructed two equipment bridges, which too had been partially damaged by the retreating Pakistan engineers; a couple of chords had been cut with explosives and I instructed the Army Engineers to repair them immediately. The approach to the bridge was one quagmire and the engineers were beating their heads out to somehow organise a reasonably firm surface for the traffic to move along smoothly.

By the afternoon we were driving past the gun area just short of Brahmanbaria. I met the Divisional Commander at his tactical headquarters at the town stadium. A helipad was located close at hand. His leading Brigade Commander (311 Mountain Brigade) squatted a little distance off, looking away, giving the impression that he was sulking. The Divisional Commander said he was very concerned about the medium guns and needed them urgently, latest by first light the next day, 9 December. He said that if my engineers somehow got them through the Titas quagmire by midnight, he would reward me with a bottle of Scotch from the stock they had captured from the headquarters of the Pakistan 14 Infantry Division. I laughed and assured him that the guns would arrive as my engineers were working hard and had made an impressive headway. But what were his engineers doing? He had distributed them so far down the

line that they had ceased to be a meaningful engineer force. The Divisional Commander said they had nearly caught the Pak Divisional Commander; the seat of his cushioned chair, he said, was still warm when they got to his bunker at Brahmanbaria. We all laughed. How did they always manage to get away in spite of the stops, encirclements, observation posts, that we put around them? The Divisional Commander looked at me and left it at that. In any case that was neither the place nor the time to discuss such obtuse propositions. He wanted his guns. Would the engineers kindly get down to it in right earnest?

I drove to Brahmanbaria. The town was agog with excitement. People cheered, laughed, embraced and shouted: 'Joi Bongla!' In a school building were housed the headquarters of my engineer regiments; almost two engineer regiments from the Corps resources were now supportng the Division. I spent some time with them. Quite a crowd was milling around. The school office, library, class rooms were all unlocked, and I was quite impressed with the educational and sports equipment, and the books in the library. I wondered why no one ever locked them. Someone suggested that the majority of the staff were from West Pakistan and they had left the previous day, in abject hurry.

Immediately south of Brahmanbaria is the Titas channel which joins the two legs of the long southward loop the river makes in the Akhaura-Brahmanbaria area. Water flowed slowly. All channels took steamer service. Titals joined the Meghna about 15 kilometres south-west of Brahmanbaria. Both the rail and road bridges over this channel had been demolished. The rail bridge blocked a part of the channel and there were five steamers trapped on its eastern side. I studied the situation along with the officer commanding the Engineer Regiment, and decided that a Bailey bridge to take class 18 loads - to meet the requirement of mechanical equipment, light armour and medium guns - ought to be put up urgently to support the Division's plan to capture Ashuganj and the rail bridge over the Meghna.

It was getting on to evening when we started back. The weather was fine. At the gun area some guns were firing towards Ashuganj and pillars of smoke were visible. Under

a grove, mules, which had brought the guns - Mountain Division! - were being tended to. A large number of troops hung around in so many bunches. Two aircraft flew over the area in wide circles, then straightened their course and let off a couple of rockets over Ashuganj. There were cracking explosions and then pillars of rising smoke in the distance.

We were back in the area of the Titas and the soft, muddy banks. Engineers were struggling hard, laying duck boards, pierced planking, bricks, even sommer feld track and coir matting, to get the guns across. Men were spattered with mud, carrying, pushing, pulling, under the firm command of the non-commissioned officers who also lent them a hand whenever the need arose. There were other troops around pushing vehicles and guns. Things were moving. Some heavy vehicles and medium guns had already got across the marshy area. The track looked better now than it did when I first saw it in the morning.

The problem of stores was exercising my mind at this stage. The marshy area had consumed too much. The contingency of having to cross the marshes of the Titas had been put upon us at the last minute because of a switch in plans, and had not been adequately provided for. Attack was building up against Ashuganj, and, as far as we knew, there was no track at all between Brahmanbaria and Ashuganj. Some Mukti Bahini informers had tended to suggest earlier that some kind of alignment existed but there was nothing, except, perhaps, a footpath along the railway embankment. A large quantity of engineer stores would be required there. The job had to be performed by 234 Army Engineer Regiment. I discussed the plan with the officer commanding, and made available to him the resources he required. Light dozers were ordered to be moved up immediately.

It was one of the aims of the Corps and the Division to capture the bridge over the Meghna intact. Obviously the Command desired that too. It was a rail bridge, and to convert it for road traffic would have been a major, time-consuming task. At the Corps Headquarters we did not know whether it was only a rail bridge or a rail/road bridge. With the far bank of the river at Bhairab Bazar dominated by the enemy, and with us just not possessing the

capability to deck the bridge - it had a span of almost a kilometre - it was not clear why there was this obsession for its capture. It appeared that the idea had been propounded at the Command Headquarters without sufficient consideration: the Army is supposed to capture all bridges intact! No special effort, however, had been allotted to achieve this. A mere statement of the need, on paper or verbally on telephone, had been considered to be good enough.

By the time I got back to the Corps Headquarters it was late in the evening, and information had already come that the western span of the bridge had been demolished. The Corps Commander rang up to say that 61 Brigade had captured Elliotganj. The task allotted to the Brigade was to contain Maynamat, and capture of Elliotganj by it was indeed good news. In the original plan 57 Division was to capture Elliotganj-Daudkandi, and now that the Division had been diverted to the north, this task had been relegated in priority. So the Brigade had achieved the task of a whole Division. The Corps Commander was in excellent humour, notwithstanding the demolition of a span of the Meghna bridge. This part of the operation had, no doubt, been his personal triumph, and he had rung up primarily to express his appreciation of the 4 Engineer Regiment work. The Regiment was to make a road out of a rickshaw track which had been under water till the middle of November. More than 25 kilometres separated the start point from the proposed crossing site on the Gumti river. In between bridges were required on Pagli and Titi Nadis, each having a span of around 60 feet. Light tanks, mountain guns, ammunition, rations, light dozers, were to be inducted over this track.

The Engineer Regiment had been given the task about a month in advance, around the first week of November. They had trained and rehearsed under simulated conditions. The commanding officer was a Bengali, and he had established excellent relations locally. The Mukti Bahini was unable to provide the information he wanted to plan for the operation, but they were prepared to take the engineers to places about which the information was required. The result was that, almost down to section level, the personnel concerned had seen the places they wanted to know about. The plan, and how it was to be executed, was very clear in their minds.

Since these men had been in and out of East Bengal, they had a fairly good idea of the places occupied by the enemy. On the morning of 4 December, I accompanied the Corps Commander to the Headquarters of 61 Mountain Brigade. The Brigade Commander painted a fairly grim picture of the strength of the enemy deployed opposite him. The Corps Commander asked for my view, and I said that the Brigade was not likely to meet much opposition till after the crossing of the Gumti. The Brigade Commander did not like it, but we were in genuine touch with the ground situation. The quiet wanderings of our sappers had brought better and more accurate information than that gathered by the armed patrol of the infantry, or the Mukti Bahini. The Brigade Commander, for some reason, believed that the subject matter fell solely within his jurisdiction and any opinion different from his was an affront to him and the set-up that he represented. We were used to this attitude even at the different divisional headquarters. Subsequent events proved us right. The Brigade Commander's views, perhaps, were coloured by what he had seen at Dhalai; he had taken over the brigade after the previous Commander had been wounded during the Dhalai attack.

When word was given to the engineers soon after first light on 6 December, their light dozers rolled out, accompanied by the engineer personnel, who were followed by a well-motivated force of over 2,000 Bengali labourers from the local refugee camps. Bailey equipment for Pagli and Titi Nadis was carried on jeeps and one-ton vehicles, and last of all was the folding boat equipment, also on one-ton vehicles, for making a ferry on the Gumti. The equipment for the folding boat bridge on the Gumti stood ready on wheels to move at short notice. So zealous were the engineers about the task allotted to them that initially, on a couple of occasions, they were even ahead of the infantry and had to be reined back; they operated on the assumption that the enemy had already cleared out of the area, if there was any enemy there at all.

In a matter of 29 hours, by 1000 hours on 7 December, they had put up the ferry on the Gumti, and put across the guns, dozers and the vehicles of ammunition and rations. The location of the ferry was changed at the last minute from Nanuar Bazar to Etharpur, a considerable distance

downstream, as the former was considered to be under enemy observation from Maynamati and, hence, not safe. In spite of this, the complete axis had been developed to class 9 specifications by 1700 hours the same day, that is, 7 December. But the Gumti continued to be crossed on rafts till the bridge came up by 1800 hours on 9 December; the bridge span was 160 feet.

Crossing the Meghna

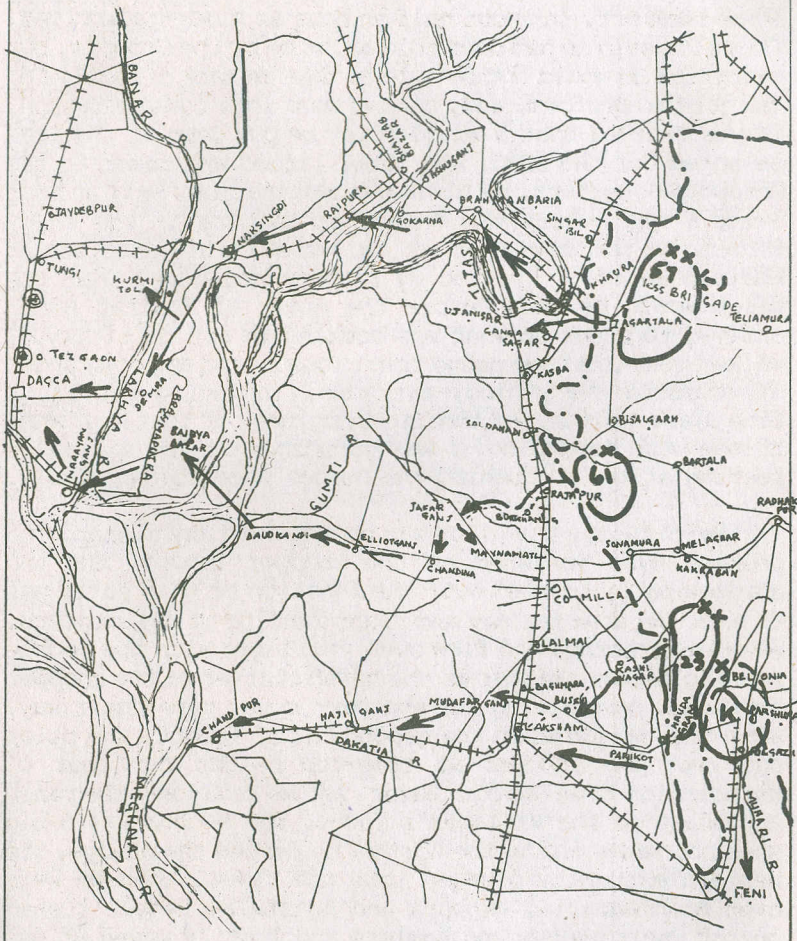
Early morning on 9 December the Corps commander rang up to say that he had decided to go across to Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj and see how much damage had been caused to the bridge, and whether it could be repaired, and how best the engineers could assist in the crossing. I said that bridging any demolished span over the Meghna was beyond our resources as each span was around 422 feet and the piers were a good height above the water level. The span of the Meghna under the bridge was around 3,000 feet. But I undertook to look into the whole problem and report back to him. When asked he said he was considering using MI-4 helicopters to go across.

I got in touch with my engineers at Brahmanbaria and was told that the western-most span had definitely been demolished. Around 1100 hours I was told by our Air Force they were going to fly me over the bridge and to the 57 Division Headquarters. After some waiting at the Comilla airfield, a helicopter arrived with a Group Captain of the Eastern Air Command. He said that he was going to Agartala airfield to organise the special heliborne operation (SHBO) and in the process would also fly me over the Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj area. There was a long halt at Agartala as the Group Captain got down to organise the SHBO, and, at long last, we left the place around 1430 hours. At Brahmanbaria the Group Captain went straight to the Divisional Headquarters to meet the Divisional Commander while I got busy getting to know the situation from the engineer officer present there. I was anxious to know how the development of track between Brahmanbaria and Ashuganj had gone along, and he told me that the engineers had put up a remarkable performance and had hewn out a track conforming to class 9 specifications, all along the railway embankment, all the way to Ashuganj, that duck boards had to be extensively used, that even armour had to

restrict itself to this track. To achieve this the engineers had used a massive complement of civil labour. He also told me that there had been a mishap with an infantry unit. Apparently, when the infantry battalion arrived in the areas of the silos located on the eastern bank, at Ashuganj, not far from the bridge, they saw a lot of attractive items like transistors, mats, sleeping bags, lying around, giving the impression that the place had just been abandoned. Before long the troops lost their cool and broke the ranks to plunder the seemingly abandoned stuff. But it turned out to be an ambush, and before long the Pakistanis let out their fire, causing many casualties, including five tanks destroyed. The situation was restored only after a stiff, spirited fight during which the Pakistanis withdrew to the western bank of the river, to Bhairab Bazar, in open boats. Our troops could have brought down fire on the escaping boats, but so shaken were they by the experience, that they let the enemy get away unmolested.

The Divisional Commander appeared gloomy when I saw him. The Group Captain told me that he had just been informed by the Divisional Commander that the Corps had ordered that the SHBO, based on ten MI-4 helicopters, be mounted at 1530 hours. Then he smiled, a supercilious smile, and said that he was not in a position to fly me over the area, or the bridge. In fact he could not even take me back to the Corps Headquarters as the MI-4 that had brought us there, was to participate in the SHBO. Could I request the Divisional Commander for a jeep or a jonga to take me back? I looked at the Divisional Commander. Whatever verve and enthusiasm he had displayed the previous day, appeared to have evaporated. Forgotten were the promise of Scotch, and the high praise for the hard work and camaraderie of the engineers. He said he was sorry and dismissed me out of hand. The engineer officer I had been talking to had no transport whatsoever; he had hitch-hiked to the place for some work. The Group Captain suggested that I might ask the Brigade Commander who was lolling about not far away; we had served together in 10 Division. He was in a worse state of mind, possibly because he had come under severe criticism for the way his troops had walked into the ambush in the morning. He said that he was totally committed to the SHBO.

MAP 3: 4 CORPS: TRIPURA TO DACCA



LEGEND

NOT TO SCALE

Railway
Road
River
Track
Indian Army Units:
Course followed by Indian units

Sensing my consternation and obvious irritation, the Group Captain said that I could perhaps take a lift back in the chopper which was due to arrive in a while, and saying so he took off. In about half an hour an Alouette arrived. The pilot said he had been told about me by the Groupie, but regretted he would not be able to take me back directly. He had jobs to perform, and, taking them into consideration, it was decided that I would first be put down at the area selected for the SHBO, and later lifted and taken to the Corps Headquarters, my ultimate destination. Half an hour later I was across the Meghna at Raipura in the enemy territory, put down there in full view of his garrison at Bhairab Bazar. I crossed my fingers and hoped that the pilot would be back before the enemy at Bhairab Bazar arrived to check up what was cooking in his territory. I walked over to a huge mango tree close by and sat down under it, cursing everything, everyone, including myself. A fine place to be at for the Chief Engineer at that hour when things were happening! I was conscious of the villagers peering at me from behind the bushes some distance away.

Mercifully, the pilot was back before any mishap. The peering eyes vanished as the chopper landed, and the advance party tumbled out; the function of this party was to mark the area for day and night landing of helicopters. We were airborne, and flew over villages with the people running helter skelter at the harsh clatter of the chopper overhead, some diving for whatever cover came their way, some just sprawled on the ground out of fright. The pilot had kept the chopper at tree-top height for fear of retaliation from Bhairab Bazar, and we could see the panic and alarm on the villager's faces. The Meghna was a big sheet of water and to the north I could see the bridge, its western extremity plunged into the river. Then we were over Brahmanbaria, Akhaura and Agartala. People rushed out of their houses and hamlets and lustily waved at us.

By late afternoon I was back at the Headquarters. The Corps Commander had returned; his helicopter had been fired at while flying over the Meghna in the Chandpur area. He was in fine cheer, happy that the task allotted to the Corps had been accomplished, or nearly so, and he was now set upon a new adventure across the Meghna. The bruise caused by the grazing bullet had left a vertical line of congealed blood on the forehead, like the religious vermillion mark. We discussed the engineer plan.

Sylhet

Northwards of the 57 Division was the 8 Mountain Division, comprising 59 and 81 Mountain Brigades, and other supporting arms and services, all heading towards Sylhet. Also helping the Division were 5/5 GR advancing along axis Dauki-Jaintiapur-Muktapur-Haripur-Sylhet, 1 EBR coming straight for Sylhet cross country from Kanairghat, E-Sector, which had taken charge of the Karimganj salient, and two BSF battallions advancing along the Sutarkandi-Gopalganj axis. This Division, thus, had seven Indian infantry battalions, a squadron of Ferret cars, the normal complement of artillery and engineers and other arms and services, around three battalions plus of BSF, and Headquarters EB Brigade with two EBR battalions.

Opposing this force were 313 and 202 Infantry Brigades of Pak 14 Infantry Division, each brigade having two regular infantry battalions and some paramilitary personnel. Additionally, there was one field regiment of artillery and a field company of engineers. Units of 313 Brigade were deployed to hold Latu-Kalaura-Shamsher Nagar-Maulvi Bazar and Shaistaganj while that of 202 Brigade covered the area in the north, including Latu-Charkhai-Sylhet-Sunamganj. The units thus had a large area to hold and were deployed in peni-packets in keeping with the Pak forward-leaning policy.

In order to capture Sylhet early, the Indian plan envisaged investing the final objective along all the available approaches, with 59 Brigade advancing along axis Dharmanagar (in India)-Shamsher Nagar-Munshi Bazar-Maulvi Bazar-Sylhet. The basic idea of thrusts by 5/5 GR or EB battalions or the BSF battalions, was to tie down the Pak troops in their scattered state to allow the mountain brigades to get to Sylhet in the minimum time. A brief account of the battle for the capture of the airfield at Shamsher Nagar has been given earlier. River Manu flows along the Indian and East Bengal boundary, and as part of the infrastructure, a 300-foot timber pile bridge had been constructed over it before the start of open hostilities. 10 Mahar of 81 Brigade crossed the international border at last light on 29 November with a view to taking Shamsher Nagar. There was tough resistance, and sepoy Ansuya Prasad was awarded the Mahavir Chakra posthumously when he put a

grenade into a bunker which was holding out obstinately, through its firing slit. As mentioned earlier, the Shamsher Nagar complex, including its airfield, was captured by 3 December. The roads leading to the Pak defences had been mined, and were cleared by our engineers. Pakistan had exploded three rows of five craters each - 10 to 12 feet in diameter - in the only runway (length 6,000 feet, width 150 feet, and 7 inches thick concrete surfacing). We had suitably positioned a force of civil labour and Border Roads, duly equipped and trained. As soon as this force got the green signal they got down to the job of repairing the craters, and completed the work in a matter of three days.

The fight, it seems, broke the back of the Pakistani resistance in this area, and subsequent stands by their retreating units at the defences in depth, at Munshi Bazar or Maulvi Bazar, were not so bloody.

59 Brigade had contacted Ghazipur by 4 December, but hung around the area for some time. On 5 December enemy intercepts suggested that he was totally pulling out of Sylhet to reinforce the garrisons south, including the one at Bhairab Bazar, and strengthen the defences of Dacca. During the night of 7/8 December, giving credibility to the intercepts, a force comprising one infantry battalion (4/5 GR), one troop mountain guns and two sections of engineers, was lifted by helicopters (MI-4) and put down south of Sylhet, at Mirapara. No sooner was this done than it was realised that the enemy had no intentions of abandoning Sylhet. On the contrary there was every indication that he would put up a resolute fight and concentrate both his brigades there for this purpose. This put 4/5 GR Group in a somewhat precarious position, as also the 59 Brigade, for whereas the Battalion, out in the blue, all by itself, was very vulnerable to determined enemy attacks, the Brigade, already rather cautious in conducting its operations, had now only two battalions with which to pursue its aim. It saw just too many problems in its way. The roads were mined, the bridges were down, the approach was simply covered by the enemy lurking in bushes or atop tillas. It moved just too cautiously, and ultimately managed to set out of Kalaura, a town not far inside East Bengal, only on 10 December. By this time 81 Brigade had come past Munshi Bazar and Maulvi Bazar where

the enemy had taken a brief haphazard sort of stand before withdrawing to the north of the Kusiara river. The Brigade took the Sadipur and Sherpur ferries on the river, by the evening of 10 December. The lone battalion, 4/5 GR, was still by itself, immobilised, vulnerable. Fortunately for it, the Pakistanis thought it was an Indian Brigade, and made no serious attempt to dislodge it, apart from making a show of force by occasionally bringing down fire, or stage-managing hostile activity, basically with a view to containing the Indian force in the area of its landing. On their side the Indians kept up the facade of aggressive hostility by bombing Pakistani targets in the area, every now and then. This also reassured the sequestered garrison which was liable to get demoralised had determined enemy pressure been brought to bear upon it.

In the meantime, other thrusts against Sylhet maintained their pressure. 5/5 GR coming down from Jaintiapur crossed the border on 7 December and contacted Pakistani defences at Haripur on 8 December. The place was held by one company of 31 Punjab of Pakistan, supported by a battery of field guns and plenty of Mujahids, Razakars and other paramilitary sub-units. There was stiff resistance and the place was not cleared till 13 December. Khadim Nagar cantonment of Sylhet was contacted on 14 December. The high ground overlooking the cantonment was held by 31 Punjab. 5/5 GR along with a field company of engineers, attacked the high ground, and the attack was partially successful with the engineers capturing most of their objective as it was lightly held.

Of the two BSF battalions, 84 captured Latu and 104 Srimangal, and the two battalions arrived south-east of Sylhet by 14 December.

1 EB coming from Gopalganj-Chiknagul direction sighted Sylhet on 11 December. It met with no opposition, but the cross-country move severely tested its administrative competence. Occasionally their men had to feed on banana roots. 8 EB with 59 Brigade arrived at Fenchu ganj during the night of 11/12 December.

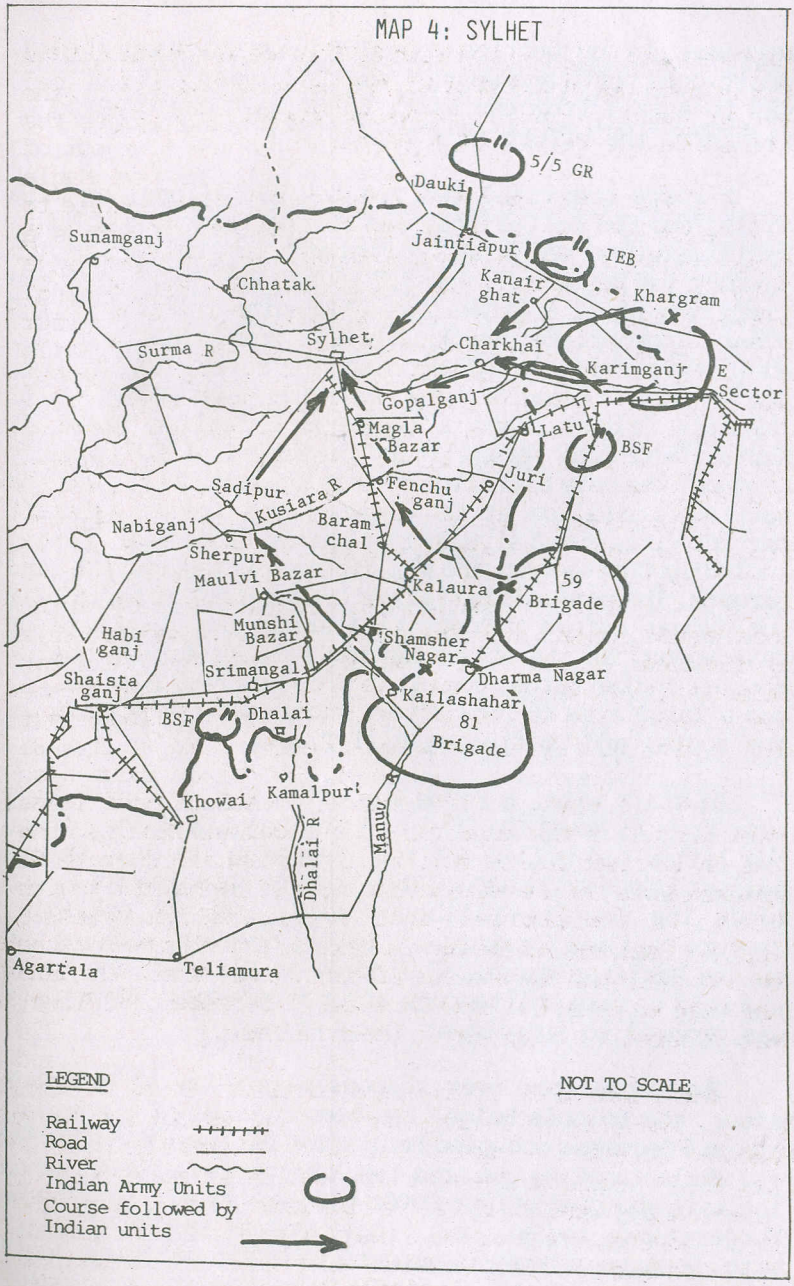
4/5 GR continued to be the source of concern. 59 Brigade pressed on but did not consider it safe to carry their guns forward as they felt that the road was mined.

Even the vehicles had been left behind, to the detriment of administration. The Battalion could be supported by the medium guns only from Magla Bazar which was across the Kusiara river. By the evening of 10 December 6 Rajput of the Brigade, after crossing the Kusiara, reached Magla Bazar. But without guns the Brigade was not of much use to the battalion at Mirapara. The engineers put across a medium gun on a class 9 raft, and it was towed by a Shaktiman lorry and brought to Magla Bazar by the evening. At this stage the Brigade was earmarked to be airlifted for the Dacca battle, and was ordered to concentrate at Kaila Shahar on 13 December, but hardly had the Brigade done so when Pakistan mounted heavy pressure on 4/5 GR, or so it was thought, and the Brigade was told to immediately turn about and resume the advance to establish the link-up with the battalion. Instead, 10 Mahar ex-81 Brigade was moved to Kaila Shahar for air lifting to Dacca. The link-up was finally established on 14 December.

The Kusiara at Fenchuganj was crossed entirely on the local craft, the country boats and dinghies made available by the local population. 6 Rajput attacked the Pakistan defences in this area from the north and 9 Guards from the west. The enemy abandoned the defences and was next contacted at the Sylhet railway station. 3 Punjab from 81 Brigade, advancing along the Maulvi Bazar axis also contacted the enemy about the same time. Both battalions attacked during the night 13/14 December and captured the railway station by first light 14 December. For the 81 Brigade also the Kusiara crossing had been mainly with local help. The engineers could provide only one class 5 raft at Sherpur, while at Sadipur a ferry sunk by the retreating Pakistanis was pulled out with local help, and used. By 15 December the Pakistani garrison at Sylhet, comprising 110 officers, including three brigadiers, 200 JCOs and 6,000 men had been effectively contained and rendered incapable of taking any part in the operations.

K Force

By 9 December both 23 and 57 Divisions had secured the line of the Meghna in their respective areas of responsibility. In 23 Division, after the fall of Laksham and Chandpur, both 181 and 83 Mountain Brigades were free. Accordingly, 181 Brigade was given the task of reducing


MAP 4: SYLHET
5/5 GR
Dauki
Sunamganj
Jaintiapur
IEB
Kanair ghat
Khargram
Chhatak
Sylhet
Surma R
Charkhai
Karimganj
E Sector
Gopalganj
Magla Bazar
Latu
BSF
Juri
Fenchu ganj
Sadipur
Kusiara R
Nabiganj
Baram chal
Sherpur
Maulvi Bazar
Kalaura
59 Brigade
Habi ganj
Munshi Bazar
Shamsher Nagar
Srimangal
Dharma Nagar
Shaista ganj
Kailashahar
BSF
Dhalai
81 Brigade
Khowai
Kamalpur
Manuu R
Dhalai R
Agartala
Teliamura
LEGEND
Railway
Road
River
Indian Army Units
Course followed by Indian units
NOT TO SCALE

Maynamati in conjunction with 61 Brigade which was already positioned north and west of the cantonment; 181 Brigade was to assail from the east. 83 Brigade was ordered to reinforce the effort of K Force.

K Force comprised two regular battalions, ex-Mizo Hills, two EBR battalions, one BSF battalion, six Mukti Fauj companies, one mountain regiment less battery, Mujib Battery (of Bengalis), two 3.7 inches BSF howitzers, one field company of engineers ex-234 Engineer Regiment, and other appropriate headquarters, communications and administrative backing. Opposing this force, Pakistan had two regular companies and Mujahids and EPCAF of 91 Infantry Brigade, and a commando battalion based at Kaptai, and some paramilitary personnel of 97 Infantry Brigade; the only battalion of this Brigade, 24 FF, was the garrison battalion at Chittagong. The Indian aircraft carrier Vikrant had already blocked the East Bengal ports, including Chittagong, and was flying sorties against land targets. The commando battalion (2 Commando) at Kaptai did not appear before K Force till about the outskirts of Chittagong, as its attention had been diverted towards another Indian thrust coming in from Mizoram. Besides, it had a large area to look after, right upto Cox's Bazar in the south, and Chittagong Hill Tract.

To start with, K Force was given the task of taking over from 23 Mountain Division the Belonia Bulge, after the latter had pulled out for launching its main thrust against Laksham-Chandpur. They were to threaten Feni, and block the Comilla-Chittagong road, and, if possible, capture Feni and Zorawarganj. Later, however, because the entire Pakistan garrison withdrew to Laksham, the Force was told to take Chittagong; after 9 December, 83 Brigade was ordered to supplement their effort.

The Force took over responsibility on 30 November after the Belonia Bulge had been cleared of the enemy, and on 6 December occupied Feni after Pakistan had vacated it. While vacating the area the Pakistanis had demolished the rail and road bridges over the Feni river. To get the Force moving, the engineers built a class 18 raft to begin with. Because of heavy commitment of bridging resources in 23 Division, we had very little left with which to cover the 200-foot gap at Sobhapur. Ultimately, the Parikot

Folding Boat Equipment bridge was dismantled, after providing suitable detours, and with this and whatever was left over, a folding boat Equipment bridge was put up by 14 December.

On 8 December, Zorawarganj was contacted; it was taken on 10 December after Pakistan had vacated it. At this stage it was decided to advance along two axes, namely Sitakund-Chittagong and Hathazari-Chittagong. While the main thrust was directed along the former axis, a flank protection force comprising 4 EB and Mujib Battery, moved along the latter. 10 EB had earlier been directed to Noakhali, to eliminate any resistance in that area and take it under control, which it did by 10 December. Afer that the Battalion returned to the Force.

The first opposition from the enemy came at Sitakund, and this was cleared by 32 Mahar and 10 EB on 12 December. During the night of 12/13 December Kumirahat position was reached. This position was held by one company of 15 Baluch and another of 24 FF. Along the other axis, 4 EB had advanced upto Nazirhat by this time. During the night of 13/14 December, 31 Jat captured Kumirahat. After this the Pakistanis had all but given up, and the withdrawing troops put up only token resistance, not that they had taken up any tough stand earlier. By 15 December the advance was taken over by 83 Brigade whose 2 Rajput captured Faujdarhat on the outskirts of Chittagong, and then on 16 December, 3 Dogra entered Chittagong itself. All along, INS Vikrant blocked the port and pelted shells into sensitive areas, and this certainly had a demoralising effect on the defending garrison. From 14 December, shelling by the Vikrant was coordinated and incorporated in the overall fire plan; earlier they had taken on some important targets, including the refinery at Chittagong.

Special Force

A Force of around 2,000 from Assam Rifles and others, from Headquarters Mizo Hill Range, on manpack basis, administratively supported by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft (supplies were air-dropped) advanced from Mizoram to Chittagong Hill Tracts. They moved over difficult terrain in three columns from the north-east,

east and south-east and headed for the salient north of Ramgarh, Rangamati and the southern Hill Tracts. During 21 and 24 November while they took the salient, they only managed to lean against Rangamati. Towards the south they met with only limited success and the area, including Cox's Bazar, continued to be dominated by 24 FF almost till the end of the operations. Pak 2 Commando, based on Kaptai, were located in this area, but a part of the Battalion were involved in the defence of Chittagong and approaches to it. Only a company-plus were defending the Hill Tracts, and they, along with Mizo rebels, for whom the Pakistanis had an elaborate training camp at Rangamati, appear to have surprised the column heading for Rangamati, and there were casualties. The Force had taken almost one quarter of the Hill Tracts, but that barely provided any significant tactical advantage to the Indians. At best they pinned down a part of the 2 Commando and 24 FF, but that was a small achievement for a force of this size. Rangamati was taken by 83 Brigade on 15 December, after the Pakistanis had vacated it. It is possible that, in conjunction with R Force, they were to prevent the Pakistanis from escaping into Burma. But the Pakistanis made no such attempt.

R Force

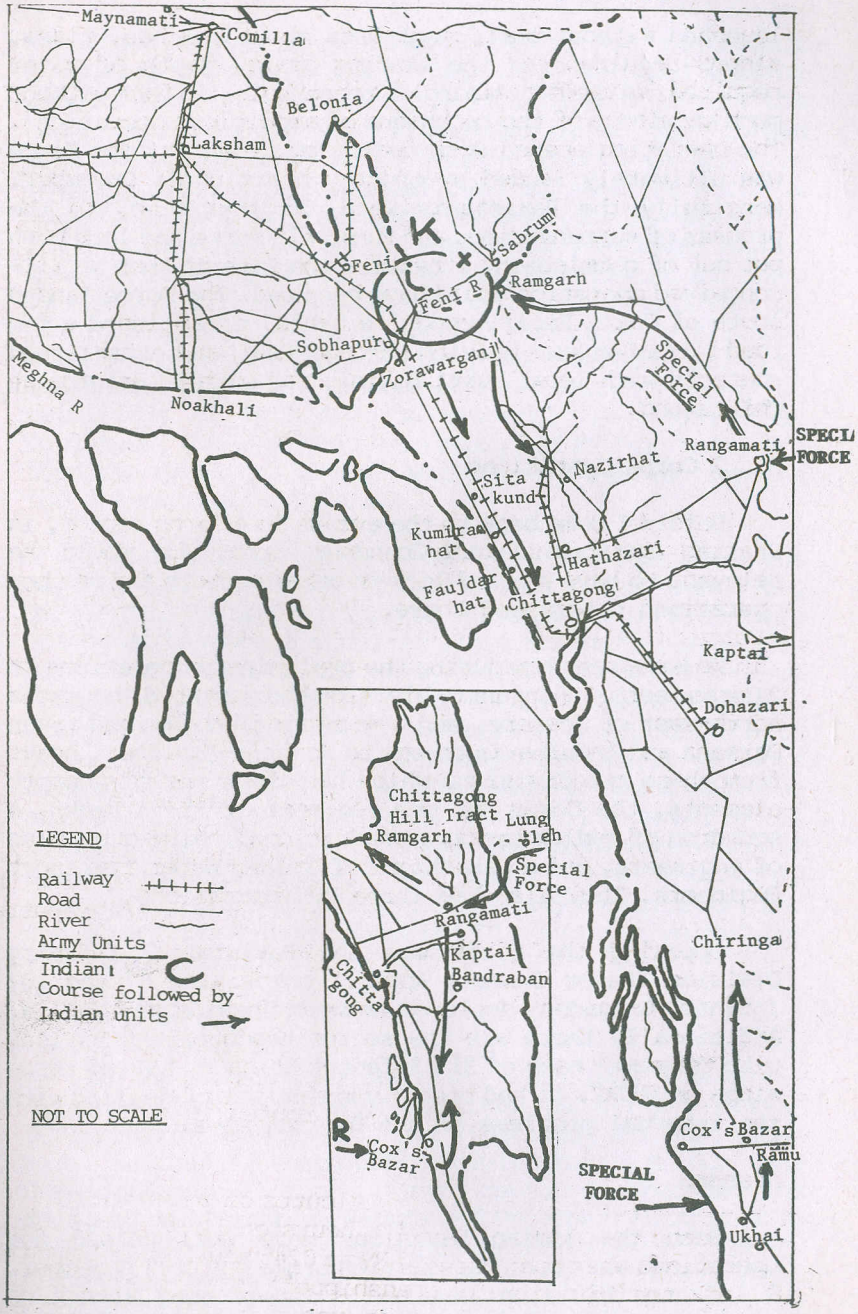
Operating from the sea was the R Force, comprising an ad hoc headquarters, one infantry battalion and two infantry companies, one light battery of artillery, one platoon of engineers, and other administrative units; one tentacle with air contact team was also there. From the Indian Navy there were INS Guldar, Gharial, Brahmaputra, Beas and MV Vishva Vijay.

This force was to go under 4 Corps after landing.

Opposite this force were a company each of 24 FF, Rangers and EPCAF. Additionally, there could be troops trying to escape to Burma over routes in area Dohazari-Chiringa-Cox's Bazar.

The Force assembled at Calcutta on the night of 10/11 December and sailed at 0445 hours on 12 December. Ships Guldar and Gharial reached RV at 0245 hours on 14 December, and the troops were transhipped to lighter craft by morning. But the operation was a fiasco. It had been

MAP 5: K FORCE, SPECIAL FORCE & R FORCE



launched without sufficient data about beaches, tides, slopes required for the landing craft, depth of water required, without training or rehearsals, in fact without much knowledge of the technique of amphibious operations. The operation opened with deaths by drowning. The Force was ultimately landed by country boats on 16 December. Mercifully the Pakistanis were, at that time, in the process of surrendering, and their Air Force had long been put out of commission, otherwise the fate of such an ill-conceived operation could have been sad. The Force landed south of Cox's Bazar, opposite Ukhia, established a few road blocks on axes passing through Ramu, and established contacts with local Mukti Bahini, and with 83 Brigade at Chittagong.

B. 2 Corps Operations

Before I come back to the events in 4 Corps sector, in Bhairab Bazar-Daudkandi-Chandpur area, it would be relevant to have a brief look in other sectors and see how operations progressed there.

We have seen how during the preliminary operations in 2 Corps sector, 9 Infantry Division had captured Chaugacha north-west of Jessore, and 4 Mountain Division had taken Darsana and Andulbaria on way to Kushtia-Faridpur. Apart from these two divisions which had their normal support elements, the Corps had one regiment of PT-76 tanks, a squadron of medium tanks, two additional regiments a plus of engineers, and a detachment of Inland Water Transport Engineers. They also had three BSF battalions.

Opposing the Corps was the Pakistan 9 Infantry Division (Major General Ansari) comprising 57 and 107 Infantry Brigades, deployed between Jhenida and Khulna. Additionally there was the sector headquarters Barisal with the cover name of 314 Infantry Brigade, having three wings of EPCAF; it had been given the task of dealing with the internal problems in the Barisal area.

Jessore

Both the Indian Divisions were well poised for operations when open hostilities broke out on 3 December. 9 Infantry Division launched a two-pronged attack on

Jessore on 4 December. The Pakistanis had four battalions defending the approaches north, north-west and west of Jessore, and the Indian 9 Division decided to direct the main thrust along the Chaugacha axis. The column spearheaded by tanks and infantry mounted on armoured personnel carriers, captured the road junction north of Jessore and cut off the town from Jhenida. The attack on the town was mounted on the morning of 6 December and by midday 7 December it had been vacated by Pakistan and taken by the Indians. The Pakistanis withdrew towards Khulna, almost intact. The withdrawal of 107 Infantry Brigade, which had been defending Jessore, was covered by its 22 FF which was originally located at Benapole. The other two battalions of this Brigade prepared the defences at Daulatpur, and when they were ready, 22 FF fell back, and then the remaining Brigade withdrew further to complete the defences around Khulna.

Indian advance out of Jessore started soon after the capture of the town. Terrain conditions were very difficult. The western side of the road was infested with swamps while river Bhairab ran along its eastern side. The advance was slow as the enemy could find any number of areas where he could delay without expending much effort. Chengutia was taken on 10 December and Phultala on 11 December, and the main defences at Daulatpur were contacted the same day. This was a well-prepared position and manned by three battalions. Between 11 December and 15 December a series of preliminary operations were launched against the defences, and these were thoroughly successful. By the morning of 16 December when orders for the ceasefire were received the Division was poised for the final assault.

Hardinge Bridge

In the north 4 Mountain Division less 7 Mountain Brigade (which had been earmarked as Corps reserve) advanced against the Pakistani 57 Infantry Brigade, along axes Kaliganj-Jhenida-Bheramara-Hardinge Bridge and Jhenida-Magura-Faridpur, and captured Jhenida and Kaliganj on 7 December, Magura on 8 December, Kushtia on 11 December and Bheramara and Hardinge Bridge on 12 December. 7 Mountain Brigade was released to the Division after Jhenida had been captured, and this Brigade took Kushtia

while Hardinge Bridge was taken by 41 Mountain Brigade. 57 Infantry Brigade crossed the Hardinge Bridge during 11/12 December, and then joined 16 Infantry Division at Nator. A part of the bridge was destroyed on 12 December after the Brigade had crossed over.

Faridpur

62 Brigade of 4 Mountain Division had captured Magura on 8 December, and the intention was to advance to Faridpur along Magura-Madhukhali-Faridpur axis. The Pakistani 9 Infantry Division Headquarters had been located at Magura. It had lost all control over its brigades, and, in the face of the imminent Indian advance, decided to pull out. At this stage there was a setback at Kushtia. On 8 December 22 Rajput, who along with supporting armour, were leading the advance, were caught off guard in the Kushtia town when they walked into a cleverly laid Pakistani ambush. There were heavy casualties including five tanks lost. The Corps decided to freeze the advance against Magura, and directed the Division to reinforce the effort against Kushtia. The Pakistanis were already withdrawing across the Ganga and the leading battalion of 7 Mountain Brigade ran into the rear elements of the withdrawing force. By the time the Division was back on the Kushtia front, the Pakistanis were already across, and a part of the bridge had been blown up. So the Division rushed back to Magura to get on with the advance to Faridpur. But by this time the Pakistani divisional headquarters and whatever elements were there with it, had already gone across the Madhumati river, to organise whatever defence with whatever ramshackle elements they had.

7 and 62 Mountain Brigades completed their concentration for going across the Madhumati by 1 December. They crossed in country boats astride the Magura-Madhukhali-Faridpur axis, then advanced in a pincer move to trap the elements holding the eastern bank of the river. They not only succeeded in rounding up the defenders but also got the General commanding the Pak Division and his staff, in the bag. By the time the Indians entered Faridpur, the Pakistanis had already declared their intention to surrender.

The engineers put up a 1,388-foot long bridge with folding boat and Baily bridge equipment, which they completed in a matter of 36 hours, using only five field companies of their engineers. In between, to speed up the pace of operations, after the capture of Jessore, Headquarters Eastern Command had made available 50 Para Brigade less one battalion. The Brigade with a squadron of PT-76 tanks, advanced from Jessore to Magura via Arpara, but barely had it reached Arpara, when, on 8 December, Magura was taken by 5 Division. At this stage it was decided to bring the Brigade back to Jessore to move it to the west for operations along the Indo-West Pakistan border.

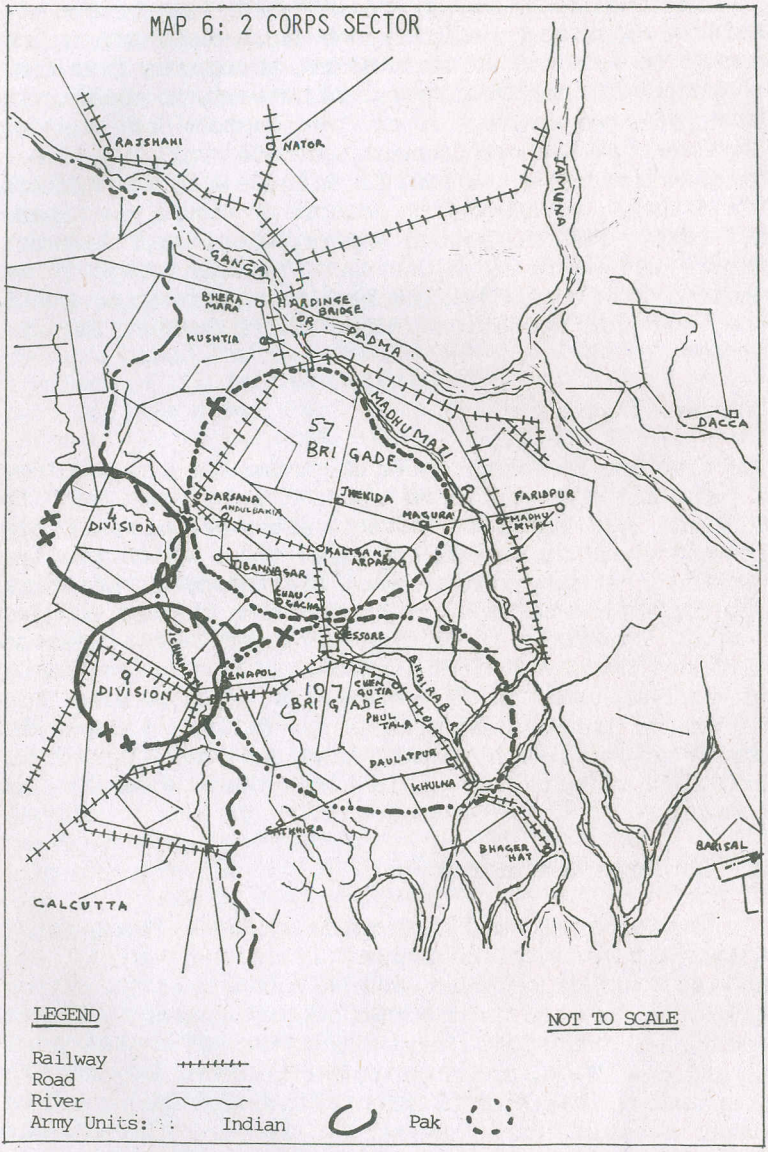
Engineer Support

The riverine terrain imposed major engineering problems. I have already mentioned about the bridges over the Ichamati and Madhumati. Advance after Jessore, and also towards Kushtia, was along earth roads which required constant strengthening and maintenance. At times approaches had to be strengthened with ballies and duck boards, sometimes in as many as seven layers. Jessore airfield had five 20-foot diameter craters, and any number of smaller craters. The engineers repaired them in a matter of three days with brick filling topped with concrete slabs. Each Division utilised over 1,000 tons of bridging material in this less-than-two-weeks-long operation.

C. 33 Corps Operations

The Corps had 9 and 71 Mountain Brigades, Headquarters 6 Mountain Division, 20 Mountain Division having 66, 202, and 165 Mountain Brigades, and 340 Mountain Brigade Group. All formations had their normal support arms and services. Additionally the Corps had two regiments of armour, one T-55 and one PT-76, and an engineer brigade. Opposing the Corps was the Pakistan 16 Infantry Division (Major General Nazar Hussain Shah) having 23, 34, and 205 Infantry Brigades, a regiment (29 Cavalry) of M-24 tanks (Chaffees), two artillery regiments (105 mm howitzers), one independent heavy mortar battery (120 mm) and around 15,000 paramilitary personnel.

MAP 6: 2 CORPS SECTOR



LEGEND

NOT TO SCALE

Railway

Road

River

Army Units: Indian Pak

The operations of the Corps were basically directed against securing the Siliguri corridor, and reducing the enemy defences in the strongholds located in the area bounded by the rivers Brahmaputra in the east and the Ganga in the south. To secure the corridor 9 Mountain Brigade of one battalion was made available, while one battalion ex-99 Mountain Brigade was earmarked as reserve. The Brigade was at 72 hours notice for moving back to Bhutan in the event of a Chinese threat developing in the north. It was given one mountain regiment less battery and one light battery. It had no armour, nor any bridging equipment. The Brigade was to operate only in the northern part of the Corps sector so that its move to Bhutan, when required, could be effected without undue delay.

The Northern Pockets

In the first instance the Brigade got down to clearing the pocket between Dhudhkumar nullah and Dharla river, called the Bhurungamri salient. It was lightly held and the Brigade captured all area upto Nageshwari by 30 November, having entered the salient on 14 November. The entire salient was cleared by 2 December, and the Brigade, after handing over the area to BSF, moved over to clear the area between rivers Dharla and Tista - the Tista pocket. Here 12 Garhwal Rifles less company had already secured Barakhata on 19 November. The task of the Brigade was to secure all area north of Tista, including Lalmanir Hat, and this the Brigade (with three battalions including 12 Garhwal Rifles) did by 6 December, after our Air Force had incessantly bombed and strafed the enemy positions, and the Pakistanis had blown up the bridge on the Tista. The area was the responsibility of The Pakistani 34 Infantry Brigade and was guarded mostly by elements of the Pakistani 25 Punjab and paramilitary personnel; 34 Brigade also looked after the southern portion of the sector. After this, 9 Mountain Brigade was given to 20 Mountain Division for containing Dinajpur from the south and guarding the Mohanpur bridge. Employment of this Brigade in continuous operations was precluded on account of the tasks assigned to it in Bhutan.

Pachagarh Salient

The task of reducing this area was given to 71 Mountain Brigade supported by a weak (eight tanks) squadron of PT-

76 tanks. The Brigade entered the salient on 21 November and captured Pachagarh on 29 November, Boda on 1 December and Thakur Gaon on 4 December, covering a distance of 5 kilometres from the border. On 5 December the Brigade took Birganj, but could not prevent the enemy from destroying the bridge on river Dhepa at Kantanagar. The area was being defended by elements of the Pakistan 48 Punjab and paramilitary personnel under 23 Infantry Brigade, whose second battalion, 26 FF, was deployed around Dinajpur; 48 Punjab looked after all the area between Thakurgaon and Saidpur. 71 Brigade made two attempts to cross the river at Kantanagar, but failed, with heavy casualties, including four tanks damaged - two on account of enemy recoilless anti-tank gun fire, and two through running over mines. There was a stalemate.

During the planning stage, Command had promised 123 Mountain Brigade to the Corps, but at the last minute the decision was reversed. The need for this Brigade was very much felt at this stage of the operations. However, rather than sitting still and staring into the enemy, the Brigade crossed Atrai river at Khansama, north of Birganj, on 13 December, after containing Kantanagar. The idea was to secure Nilphamari and threaten Saidpur from the north, and subsequently reduce it in conjunction with 20 Division. An additional battalion from 99 Brigade was made available to 71 Brigade on 14 December as its own resources had depleted on account of the commitment of containment at Kantanagar and the battalion-strength block the Brigade had to put up between the enemy opposing him, and Dinajpur. The Brigade secured Darwani on 15 December, and on 16 December when the hostilities ceased, it was barely a few kilometres south of Nilphamari.

It will be seen that with the securing of the northern salients by 1 December, any Pakistan threat to the Siliguri corridor - 25 kilometres in width, and 70 kilometres from the Chinese south-eastern border - had been eliminated.

20 Mountain Division

The task allotted to the Division was to capture Hilli, cut the Rangpur-Bogra axis and then, depending on the situation, capture Rangpur or Bogra or both. For this

the Division had its integral infantry and other arms and services, 340 Mountain Brigade Group, and PT-76 and T-55 tanks, and an engineer brigade. 202 Mountain Brigade of this Division was deployed opposite Hilli since the end of October, and 66 Mountain Brigade was to its north, opposite Mohanpur-Phulbari axis, and 165 Brigade held the firm base in the Balurghat bulge. 340 Brigade Group which had already given a battalion each to 202 and 66 Brigades, was located north-west of Balurghat, along the Balurghat-English Bazar road.

Hilli

It had been decided to reduce the Hilli position of the enemy during the preliminary operations. On 24 November, 8 Guards of 202 Brigade opened the attack but net with very stiff resistance. Hilli is partly located in West and partly in East Bengal. The Pakistani defences were manned by 4 and 13 FF, and a field company of their engineers (in infantry role, as a last resort), and supported in strength by guns and tanks; of the tanks they had almost a squadron. Indians were supported by a squadron of T-55 tanks provided with night operation capability. But the ground was dotted with soft, marshy patches and was hardly suited to the operation of medium tanks. The attack made some headway but then got stalled, and there were heavy casualties.

The second phase of the attack mounted by 5 Garhwal Rifles against Basdeopur BOP was successful, but subsequent progress became difficult and costly, and once again there was a stalemate, which continued till 11 December when enemy positions were attacked from their rear; this should have been done right in the beginning, and frontal attacks on well-prepared defensive positions should have been avoided. A lot more care should have been exercised in studying and selecting the right kind of armour; PT-76, perhaps, would have done better under the circumstances.

On 30 November, after taking stock of the situation, it was decided only to contain Hilli, by-pass Dinajpur, and mount a two-brigade-strong thrust along axis Mohanpur Bridge-Phulbari-Palashbari-Gaibanda. The idea was to capture Bogra from Palashbari, for this would not only

deny to the enemy the use of the north-south roads, but also deny to him the use of the trans-Jamuna ferries for evacuation to Dacca. Accordingly the Corps cover plan, operated by Headquarters 6 Mountain Division, aimed at making the Pakistanis believe that the main Indian thrust was directed against Rangpur-Saidpur, was put into operation. It worked, for the enemy deployed almost six battalions, out of the 11 he had, in this area, thus reducing resistance against the 20 Division thrust. Once the thrust got going, and got behind Hilli, that position would get unhinged on its own. After capture of Hilli and Bogra, the Division was to secure the Serajganj and Bera ferries, clear the southern portion of the sector, including Nator, and link up with 2 Corps at Hardinge Bridge. Thereafter, the clearance of the northern portion of the sector was to be taken up.

Charkhai

In keeping with the plan given above, 66 Mountain Brigade secured Mohanpur on 2 December and Phulbari the next day. From now on the advance was led by a composite group of T-55 and PT-76 tanks and mechanised infantry battalion on APCs. Charkha was secured on 4 December. During the advance the engineers converted the railway embankment into a high classification road; the actual dirt track was so soft that APCs got stuck on it every so often, and found movement along it very difficult. 6 Guards took Nawabganj on 5 December.

Bogra

340 Mountain Group was activated at this stage, as 66 Brigade was already fairly stretched. Phulbari-Charkhai-Pirganj axis had been well-prepared for defence by the Pakistanis. 340 Brigade had had its battalions already allotted to different tasks, and it took around 36 hours to collect them. It got out of the bridgehead across the Kartoya river by midday 7 December. The advance along the Nawabganj-Pirganj axis was led by a composite group of 69 Armoured Regiment less squadron (PT-76 tanks) and 2/5 Gorkha Rifles, with the infantry riding on a squadron of tanks. They captured Pirganj the same day. Road blocks were established north and south of the town to block the Pakistani traffic between Rangpur and Bogra. The same

evening Major General Nazar Hussain Shah, the Commander of the Pakistan 16 Infantry Division, and his party, bumped into northern block while travelling from Rangpur to Bogra. They nearly got captured. On realising what had happened to them, they quickly abandoned their vehicles and escaped into the closeby woods. Their vehicles blew up under fire. A marked map of the General was found in the jeep abandoned by him. He had been hurt, and had to wait hidden in the bushes for quite some time till a search party eventually rescued him. Till the arrival of the search party he had, apparently, taken shelter in the house of a Bengali villager.

The reaction to the capture of Pirganj was sharp both at Bogra and Rangpur, and two companies of 32 Baluch, led by their Commanding Officer, rushed to Pirganj, from Bogra, and hit the southern road block around midnight. Their attack was repulsed with heavy losses; even the Commanding Officer was killed. Around the same time two companies of 8 Punjab charged down from Rangpur, but by the time they hit the northern block, the Indian position had been strengthened with the arrival of 5/11 Gorkha Rifles, and the Pak attack did not make any headway. But they managed to rescue their General.

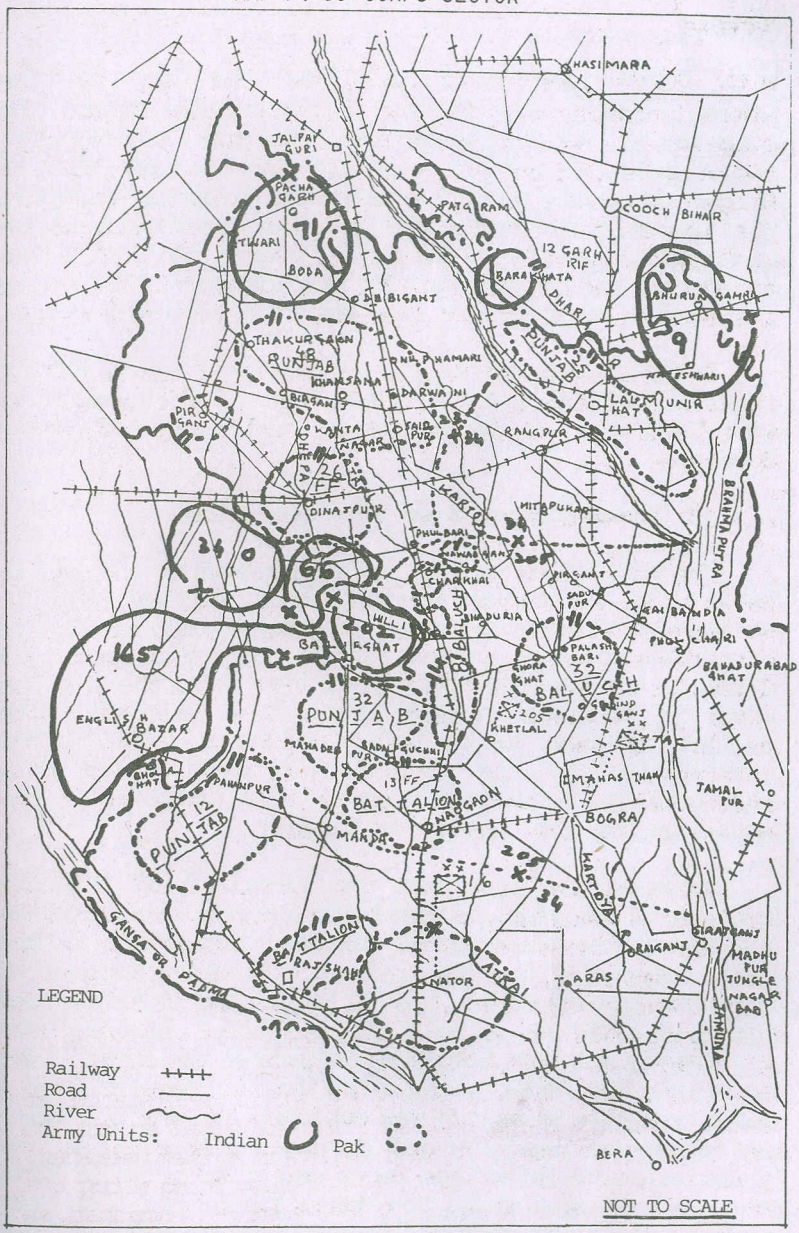
The spirit and ferocity of the Pakistani reaction made 340 Brigade reorganise for further operations more deliberately, and the advance was resumed by first light on 9 December. The Brigade made four mobile columns out of 5/11 Gorkha Rifles, 6 Guards and 29 Armoured Regiment, and they quickly spread in all directions, capturing Palashbari by midday the same day, Gaibanda by the afternoon of 10 December, as also Phulchari ferry on the most direct escape route to Dacca. This ferry had been damaged by the Indian Air Force and whatever remained of it was destroyed by ground action. The facility for crossing own troops to the support advance against Dacca, was thus curtailed, even if any plans for such a support existed. Obviously, there were no such plans. In the final stages the idea to put across a brigade with guns and armour was considered, but had to be dropped as the constituent units of this force were so dispersed that they just could not be assembled in time for the purpose. Ghoraghat on Karatoya river was contacted by another combat group the same afternoon. Along the main Rangpur-Bogra highway.

Gobindganj, also on the Karatoya, was tackled by two task forces, one exerting direct pressure from the north, while the other took the Pakistani defences from the south and south-east after a wide 56-kilometre outflanking move. There was intense fighting during the night of 11/12 December, when T-55s made use of their night operation capability. By first light Gobindganj was in Indian hands and the escaping Pakistani garrison was trapped by the roadblock south of the town. There was a rich haul of Pakistani tanks, vehicles, arms and ammunition.

Advance to Bogra was resumed on 12 December by a task force comprising PT-76 regiment and 5/11 Gorkhas, and contact with Pakistani position at Mahasthan, on the Karatoya river, was made by the evening. It was a lightly-held position, possibly by a company-plus, but it never got a chance to get organised. The Indians secured the northern bank immediately on arrival, and soon after dark sneaked in a company of Gorkhas, who bumped into the battalion headquarters controlling that sector and captured the officiating Commanding Officer, his adjutant and the medical officer, and destroyed whatever communications system was operating there. The position was cleared by midnight 13 December when advance was resumed, and the armour-infantry groups surrounded Bogra during 13/14 December. The place was held by a battalion Pakistan plus although it had been prepared for a brigade. 2/5 Gorkhas set about clearing the town on 14 December and by midday major resistance had crumbled and most of the Pakistan troops surrendered, although resistance from a part of the force, comprising 4 and 13 FF and Headquarters 205 Infantry Brigade, continued till the morning of 16 December.

Once 340 Brigade had captured the areas behind the Hilli defences, the Pakistani garrison holding them was gradually withdrawn to Bogra. 66 Brigade took advantage of this and captured Ghoraghat on 12 December. On the way 17 Kumaon of this Brigade met with stiff resistance at Bhaduria and lost 50 lives; Pakistan suffered around 100 dead. 202 Brigade, with opposition against them weakened, took Hilli on 11 December, and then advancing along the Ghoraghat axis, took Khetlal, south-west of Ghoraghat, on 13 December, after a tough fight.

MAP 7: 33 CORPS SECTOR



Rangpur

With Bogra operations well on the way by the armour/infantry task forces of 340 Brigade Group, the stage was all set for the capture of Rangpur. Accordingly, two brigades, 66 and 202, were allotted the task, with 66 Brigade advancing along the main axis Mitapukar-Rangpur. The Brigade, supported by medium armour, took Mitapukar on 15 December, and by 16 December, when a cease-fire was announced, had hit Rangpur. 202 Brigade was still flexing its muscles at the start line when the cease-fire came.

In the 33 Corps sector Indians suffered around 400 all ranks killed and 1,000 wounded. Most of the casualties were suffered while attacking well-prepared enemy defences.

D. 101 Communication Zone Area operations

The task given to this formation was to advance to Dacca along the Jamalpur-Tangail axis, and, possibly, it was hoped that with the progress of operations, favourable conditions would be created for the capture of Dacca by 4 Corps, or the Area, or both. To achieve this, the Area was given 95 Mountain Brigade Group from Nagaland, with another brigade to be made available later, after intervention by the Chinese had been ruled out. Additionally, there was also to be a paradrop of one battalion for the capture of Tangail.

Opposing the area was the so-called 36 Infantry Division of Pakistan, so named with a view to deceiving the Indians of the strength of Pakistan resistance in the area, comprising the just-raised 93 Infantry Brigade of two infantry battalions, i.e. 31 Baluch and 33 Punjab, and plenty of EPCAF and paramilitary personnel. Headquarters 41 Infantry Brigade, the other brigade on the orbat of the Division, was under raising but had no regular troops under command. 31 Baluch was deployed at Jamalpur (with one company at Kamalpur) and 33 Punjab at Mymensingh. The Division was to defend the Dacca and Mymensingh sectors. This was one area where the Mukti Bahini had been very active and 'Tiger' Siddiqi, operating around Rangail and the dense jungles of Madhupur to the north of it, held almost total sway.

Kamalpur

It was decided to capture Kamalpur in early November with the Mukti Bahini, discreetly supported by the Indians, discreetly because hostilities had not yet been declared and direct involvement of the Indians tended to invite adverse comments from a section of the world media and some countries. The attack on the post was preceded by artillery fire, but as soon as the fire lifted the entire defence opened up with whatever they had, and the attack was repulsed. The Indians then realised that the post and the area around were supported by a heavy battery located at Bakshiganj, which the enemy moved about appropriately, depending upon the direction of attack. Accordingly, an ambush was laid during the night of 13/14 November by 1 Maratha Light Infantry in the area where the battery was to move in the event of an attack on Kamalpur. A mock attack was staged the following morning. The enemy did react as expected and the mortar battery was trapped and destroyed in the ambush. In the process, Major Vatsa of the engineers received a fatal bullet when, after having destroyed three mortars with the land mines he was carrying, he was working on the fourth mortar.

But Kamalpur post, a compact redoubt of concrete emplacements and bunkers, held out, even when the Indians had advised the Captain commanding the small garrison to surrender in the interest of his and the detachment's safety. During the 14 November attack, 13 Guards had managed to establish a block behind the post, blocking the Kamalpur-Bakshiganj road. Repeated attempts to remove this block cost the enemy dearly. But 13 Guards' attempt to take the post on 27/28 November also failed. On 3 December open hostilities broke out between the two countries, and the ring around the post was tightened. Having run out of rations and ammunition, and continuously bombarded and strafed, and bullied by the Indians to surrender, the post commander surrendered on the evening of 4 December after receiving, as he stated, orders from his Battalion Commander.

Jamalpur

Bakshiganj was taken on 5 December. It had been vacated by the enemy who had withdrawn to Jamalpur through a Mukti

Bahini block; the latter did not interfere with the withdrawal as it felt that the enemy column was just too strong for it! Pakistan had been forced to vacate Bakshiganj after all their exit routes had been blocked by the Indians, the weakness in the arrangement being the Mukti Bahini block. On the same day the jeep carrying the Area and the Brigade Commanders ran over a mine and blew up. The Brigade Commander escaped lightly, but the Area Commander had a serious foot injury which necessitated his evacuation. Major General Gandharb Nagra, General Officer Commanding 2 Mountain Division, was asked to take over command. Because of this incident, advance beyond Bakshiganj was delayed by almost 24 hours. This permitted the harassed Bakshiganj garrison to get away with relative ease and reinforce the defence at Jamalpur.

The Pakistan position at Sherpur, which was lightly held, was cleared by two companies of the Mukti Fauj supported by a company of 13 Guards, on the morning of 8 December. All eyes were now turned on the Jamalpur-Mymensingh line, beyond which, by their original plans, the Pakistanis were not permitting any penetration. Travelling cross-country, their essential administrative baggage loaded in bullock carts, 1 Maratha Light Infantry put up a block south of Jamalpur on the Jamalpur-Tangail road. 13 Guards who had been pulled out after Kurna had been captured by midday on 6 December, followed the same route as 1 MLI, and blocked the Jamalpur-Mymensingh road by first light on 10 December. The battalion had left behind one company for attack on the Sherpur defences. 13 Rajputana Rifles effectively dominated the northern bank of the river at Jamalpur.

Jamalpur was sealed, but no troops were available to force the enemy out of his defences. On 9 December the Brigade Commander sent a note to the Pakistani Battalion Commander (of 31 Baluch) asking him to surrender since he had been effectively surrounded by the Indians. He got a rude rebuff. The situation was a stalemate and the Brigade Commander was left with no alternative but to wait till the garrison had run out of rations and ammunition. Pounding of the position by guns and aircraft continued, but it was hardly ever expected to produce decisive results.

The overall scenario in East Bengal was changing rapidly. It had become increasingly clear that mere

capture of a part of territory and handing it over to the Bengalis, was not enough. In fact, that territory would have been recaptured by the Pakistani garrisons holding out at the strong points sprinkled all over the country, the moment the Indians left, which they would, in all probability, have had to do under international pressure. In any case, even if they defied international pressure, they would have had to hold on till Bengali armed forces could hold their own, which appeared unlikely in the foreseeable future. It became clear that if Bangla Desh was to be established, the Pakistanis would have to leave. Therefore, their unconditional surrender had to be secured, and to achieve that, Dacca had to be captured. There is, however, a lurking suspicion that the importance of taking Dacca had not been fully grasped by the Indians at any stage, for if they had, 2 and 33 Corps would not have been running after objectives which did not directly contribute to the fall of Dacca. Dacca seems to have fallen unexpectedly, like a ripe plum, into the hands of the lucky Indians.

At this stage, when Jamalpur was surrounded, 2 and 33 Corps had fully contained the Pakistani forces opposite them. 4 Corps, having bottled up the Pakistanis in their strong points, had created conditions favourable for the capture of Dacca. In fact, they had already crossed the Meghna and were in the process of getting ready for the final phase. The point to note, however, is that the inner triangle - the territory, including Dacca, bounded by the rivers Ganga, Padma and Meghna - was utterly defenceless at this stage, and 4 Corps could have taken it on 11 December. On 10 December even Niazi had announced to the whole world that he was left with no option but to surrender. But the Indians, rather than taking advantage of the situation, perhaps read too much into it and continued to be overcautious, displaying a remarkable lack of daring, and, instead, decided to ask for surrender through high-sounding broadcasts over All India Radio. This only drew smiles and hardly impressed anyone but those fed on comic strips and Robinhood tales.

167 Mountain Brigade was released to the Area at this stage. Two companies of 6 Sikh Light Infantry (6 SLI), the leading battalion of the Brigade, crossed the river and by first light on 11 December, were in positions west and

south-west of the Jamalpur defences. In the meantime, the Indian battalions across the river further tightened the grip, and the bombardment of the defences, including napalm bombing, was made more intense.

By now the Pakistanis were aware of the shift in the Indian intentions. One factor which had significantly affected the thinking of their defence planners was the presumption that India would never go for the inner triangle. Now Dacca lay exposed. The only brigade which had been earmarked for its defence had long been given away to 39 Infantry Division (53 Infantry Brigade) for the defence of Feni-Laksham, and whatever was left of it, now lay bottled up in Maynamati. They required troops to defend Dacca. The West Pakistan offensive had failed to make the desired headway. The only hope now was intervention by some superpower, or the United Nations. But till then East Pakistan had to be kept going, and Dacca had to be kept alive; it had become very vulnerable with 4 Corps menacingly poised against it.

Only 93 Brigade was available. Other units and formations were already sealed in their strong points, or were so involved with the Indians that any attempt to pull out could precipitate a rout. The Brigade Commander asked Officer Commanding 31 Baluch if he could make a clean break and withdraw to Dacca. The Commanding Officer, who had earlier spurned the Indian Brigade Commander's invitation to surrender, thought for a while, then said, 'Yes!' And the Brigade Commander gave the green signal. Defending in a country totally hostile to them, with near total black-out about what was happening around, little did the Pakistanis know that they had been completely surrounded by the Indians, who had travelled on man pack basis while the administrative trains had followed on bullock carts made available by the local population, through the Mukti Bahini who had also organised boats for the crossing of the Brahmaputra - not to be mixed with the mighty river which is called Padma in this part of the country. Jamalpur was a formidable fortress, but this withdrawal order issued by the Pakistani Brigade Commander after last light on 10 December was a god-send to the Indians. Once out of their strongly-built and well-prepared defences, the Pakistani battalion walked straight into the waiting ambushes of the Indians, who let loose hell. With their backs to the wall

the Pakistanis fought hard, but the ring around them gradually tightened. By first light, 13 Raj Rif had also come across to exert further pressure, and soon thereafter the Battalion surrendered, although the Battalion Commander managed to slip through with about 200 men. The Pakistanis had lost around 250 dead in this engagement against 10 dead of the Indians.

Mymensingh

In the meantime, 6 Bihar less two companies, plus one company of BSF, were moving down the Haluaghat-Mymensingh axis, and their two companies with one company BSF were coming down the Baghmara-Durgapur-Mymensingh axis. Both columns had ample Mukti Bahini support. This force was under the command of FJ Sector, commanded by a brigadier. The Pakistanis abandoned Haluaghat on 6 December after the place had been heavily pounded from ground and air; napalm bombs were used. During the withdrawal, they destroyed the bridge on the Kangsa river, and it took considerable engineer effort and local assistance to get the communications going. On 11 December when this force hit Mymensingh it found the place abandoned; it had been abandoned the previous night.

Tangail

The next defensive position for the Pakistanis was at Kaliakair, where the two battalions had been ordered to withdraw by their Brigade Commander. 31 Baluch had already ceased to be a cohesive force of any dimension after the events of the night of 10/11 December. Attention was, therefore, on 33 Punjab and other paramilitary personnel who had withdrawn from Mymensingh. A paradrop to intercept the withdrawing Pakistan troops at Tangail had been planned earlier, and was executed around 1600 hours on 11 December. The Pakistani Brigade Commander and the Commanding Officer 31 Baluch, were there at the time of the drop, and they nearly rushed out to greet it, thinking that the Chinese had come to their help at long last. The Pakistani Battalion Commander who had heaped ridicule on the Indian Brigade Commander for the latter's suggestion of surrender, had got injured when his vehicle ran over a mine on the Tangail-Dacca road; the mine, probably, had been planted by the freedom fighters owing allegiance to

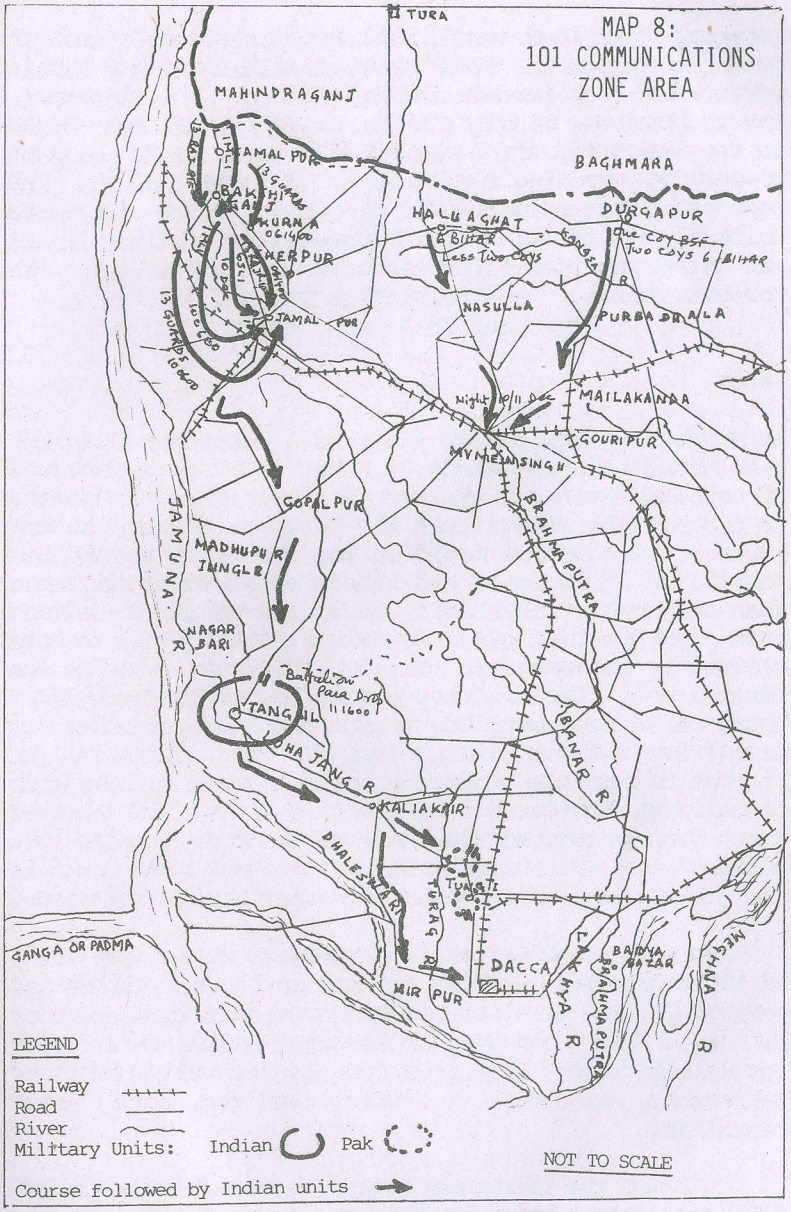
'Tiger' Siddiqi. He had been brought back to Tangail for treatment. The reality about what troops were being dropped soon got known to the Pakistanis and they beat a hasty retreat. By the time the air-dropped troops became effective and they took the bridge over the Lohajang stream, the bulk of the Pakistani withdrawing column had escaped. All that the Parachute Battalion got was mortar battery. But they were the fresh Indian troops available at this stage to press on with the operations. They were, however, hampered by administrative limitations.

The Brahmaputra at Jamalpur had a water span of 1,000 feet, and the engineers in support, a mere field company-plus, had, within a couple of hours, put up four class 9 and two class 5 rafts - this was all the equipment they had - and had built up an impressive crossing speed so that by 15 December they had put across around 600 vehicles. But that was not enough even to get 167 Brigade across in time to enable it to lead the advance from Tangail onwards. Some supplies, petrol, diesel, ammunition, were airlifted to the air strip at Tangail on 13 December, and the advance resumed with 95 Brigade; 167 Brigade so far had not become effective enough south of Jamalpur, although its lead battalion, 6 Sikh LI, had now been placed under command 95 Brigade and was leading the advance.

Withdrawing Pakistani columns had a tough time as the country was hostile and they had to avoid the main Tangail-Dacca road for fear of getting caught by the Indians who were close on their heels. Thus, those who came with the main column managed to escape, but others, following in small groups, were hunted down by the freedom fighters and other groups inimical to them. In the process, before they could cross the Turag river, north of Tungi, 93 Brigade Commander and his small party were captured by the Indians. Although the destination given to the Brigade was Kaliakair, no one stopped there, and this famished, dispirited, bedraggled force eventually managed to reach Dacca on 13 and 14 December, in bits and pieces; some men did not have even their boots on.

Kaliakair

The Pakistani resistance around Tangail having collapsed, the Indians continued the advance, and by the morning of 14


MAP 8:
101 COMMUNICATIONS
ZONE AREA
TURA
MAHINDRAGANJ
BAGHMARA
DURGAPUR
HALUAGHAT
NASULLA
PURBADHALA
MAILAKANDA
GOURIPUR
MYMENSINGH
JAMALPUR
GOPALPUR
MADHUPUR JUNGLE
NAGAR BARI
TANGAIL
KALIAKAIR
DHALESWARI R
TURAG R
DACCA
MIR PUR
BANAR R
BRAHMA PUTRA
LAKHYA R
BAJRA BAZAR
MEGHNA R
JAMUNA R
GANGA OR PADMA
LEGEND
Railway
Road
River
Military Units: Indian Pak
Course followed by Indian units
NOT TO SCALE

December the lead battalion had contacted Pakistani defences west of the river Bansi at Kaliakair; the Indian advance had continued during the night of 13/14 December. The position was held by a battalion or so with one company on the west bank, duly supported by guns and a troop of armour. By evening the Indians had established a firm base with Maratha and Sikh LI battalions on the west bank, while 13 Raj Rif and 13 Guards were on the way, and 2 Para was gathering itself for the advance from Tangail. 167 Mountain Brigade was arriving in Tangail area at about this time (7 Bihar and 10 Jammu ' Kashmir Rifles).

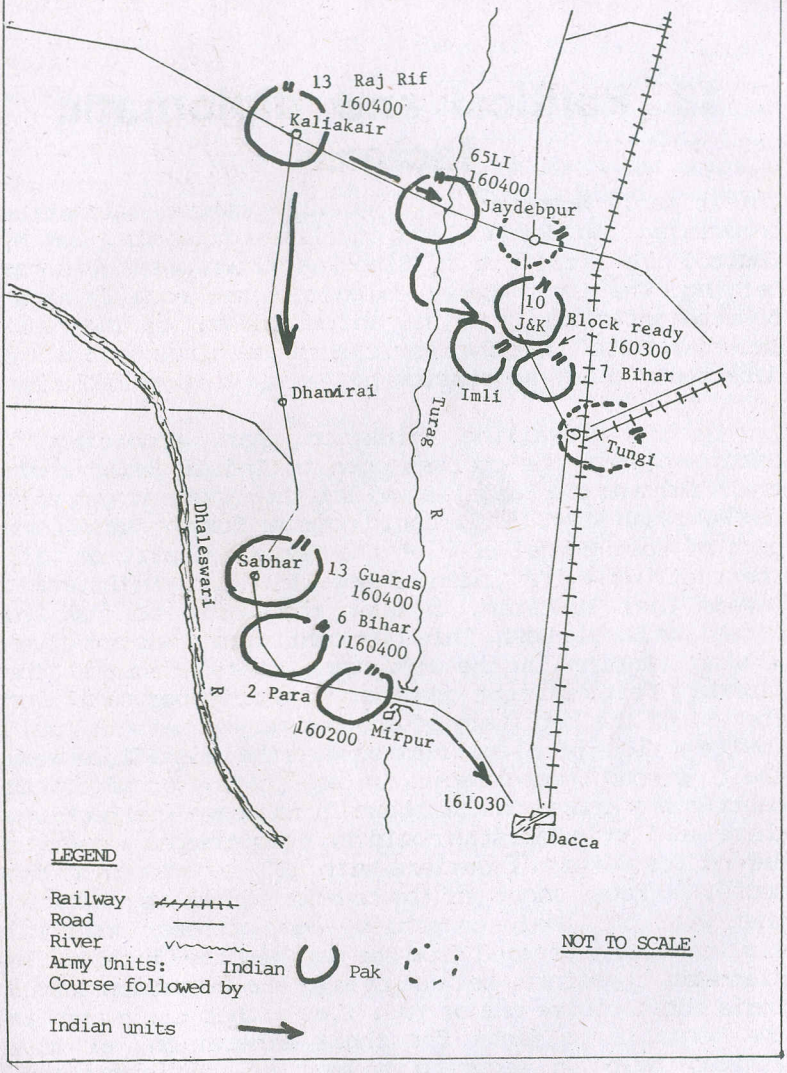
Dacca

At this stage a new combat group under Commander SJ Sector was formed with 13 Guards, 6 Bihar and 2 Para, and was directed to advance along road Kaliakair-Dhamrai-Sabhar, to capture the bridge over the Turag at Mirpur, at the earliest. The Guards moved during the night and by the morning of 15 December had taken Sabhar which had been abandoned by the Pakistanis, except for the built-up area from where some resistance was being offered; this too was cleared by the evening. From this stage the advance was taken over by 2 Para and they reached Mirpur bridge by 0200 hours on 16 December. The bridge had been prepared for demolition but the charges had not been detonated. An attempt to rush the bridge by the Para was repulsed with casualties. But Paras dominated the bridge and claimed that they prevented the Pakistanis from blowing it, although the Pakistanis said they did not blow it up as they had a number of troops on the other side of the river.

Along the road Kaliakair-Jaydebpur, during the night of 15/16 December, Indians put across 10 J&K Rifles and part of 7 Bihar, south of the Pakistani defences, and they put up a block on the Dacca-Tungi road. This block completely cut off Jaydebpur from Dacca, and attempts by Pakistanis to break it were repulsed with heavy casualties.

This was the situation west of Dacca when the cease-fire came into effect on the morning of 16 December.

MAP 9: SIEGE OF DACCA FROM WEST & NORTH



13. Political and diplomatic factors

In early November 1971, a high-powered delegation comprising top defence and civilian officials, led by Bhutto, the architect of Sino-Pak friendship, visited Beijing. The eight-member delegation met equally high-powered officials in China, and at the end of the visit Bhutto declared that the result of the meetings should be a deterrant to any aggression by India on East Pakistan.

In the prevailing situation what, according to Pakistan, were the courses open to India? India could train and arm the Bengalis and let them fight it out with the Pakistan Army. Or she could conquer for the Bengalis a part of East Bengal and let the Bengalis carry on with their struggle for independence. Finally, India could invade East Pakistan, conquer the whole of it, and establish Bangla Desh. This last contingency was not given a high ranking in the Pakistani considerations. The planners felt outright conquest by one member nation of the UN, of the territory of another member nation, could invite serious problems, more so when the US and China were their strong supporters. In any case, should that contingency arise and the US and China prove ineffective, there was little Pakistan could do, committed as she was to defend its western frontiers with all her strength. She could, perhaps, shoot off the counter offensive, but even that was not likely to achieve much unless India was simultaneously pressed from the north by the Chinese. The planners, therefore, set out to meet the situation should India adopt course one or two, i.e. either train and arm the Bengalis to fight for their liberation, or give limited help in securing a part of the territory, establish Bangla Desh there, and then leave the Bengalis to continue the fight for the liberation of the rest of the country. Accordingly, they decided that they would not permit any ingress by Bengali militants from India into East Bengal. Considering the size of the forces India had

massed around East Bengal, they felt that India would go upto the line of the major rivers, leaving the Dacca triangle for the Bengalis to take.

The plan, thus, was that in the event of a major Indian attack, the Pakistani units and formations would fight at the border for as long as possible, and then withdraw through previously prepared and stocked positions to the strong points nominated in the four geographical areas, i.e. east of Baulai-Meghna line, between Baulai-Meghna and Brahmaputra, between Brahmaputra and Ganga, and south of Ganga. The stocking of the defences was for 35 days, by which time either of the two situations was expected to get precipitated: one: India was forced to pull out its forces on account of the Chinese pressure from the north, and diplomatic and/or armed US intervention, of having taken territory up to the line of the rivers; two: India withdrew, of her own accord, or under world diplomatic pressure, after duly installing the Bangla Desh Government in the captured area. In the core of the plan, withdrawal by India at one stage or another was considered unavoidable, and that was the time for the Pakistani troops in the fortresses to sally forth and recapture the territory from the Bengalis, as they had done during April-May 1971.

It appears that the Pakistani reading of the Indian intentions was correct. Their intelligence, directly or through other countries, was well-informed of the Indian thinking. The possibility of the Indians attacking the inner triangle figured in the thinking of their Eastern Command, around the middle of November, and they asked for two more infantry divisions to defeat an Indian attack. Their Chief of Staff, Brigadier Siddiqui, was despatched to Rawalpindi to explain the case. He was promised eight battalions, almost one division. Only five arrived out of these by the end of November, but these were distributed to the areas which were under Indian military pressure.

On the political scene, under US directions, Yahya kept making promises of a fresh constitution, a government run by civilians, general amnesty to all Bengalis except those against whom criminal cases had been registered, that he would not execute Mujib, and so on. He and his coterie initiated processes to bring civilian toadies into the government with a view to giving civilian colour to the military regime.

From 20 November India initiated the process of launching a series of attacks of limited dimensions against the Pakistani border outposts, with a view to improving the offensive posture. Basically this meant elimination of defended localities which hampered a clean run to the targets deeper inside the country, and putting into practice plans which deceived the enemy of the direction and strength of our main attacks which were to come later. This phase also provided Indians the opportunity to get a feel of the Pakistani defences and recast their plans where they felt that their defences were well-organised and direct assault on them would result in heavy casualties. On 22 November, Pakistan informed the US that India had launched a major unprovoked attack against it in East Bengal. It must have sent similar communications to China and other countries friendly to it, asking the latter to particularly pressurise the US for concrete action. The US State Department, however, was not sure whether what was going on was an outright attack by India, or were border skirmishes provoked by the hostile posture that the two countries had adopted against each other. By now the US Government had almost completely veered round to the view that East Bengal's autonomy would have to be accepted, if not independence, but they wanted this to come about in an evolutionary manner, without confrontation. What worried them most, almost to the point of panic, was the possibility of India trying to wrest by force part of Kashmir that she had lost to Pakistan in 1949, and they were fairly determined to prevent that. For, apart from other considerations, they felt that such an eventuality would seriously compromise their credibility with other nations of the world, particularly those with whom they had friendly relations.

When the US Embassy in Delhi approached the Indian Government to ascertain the extent of the latter's involvement in the border skirmishes, the Foreign Ministry accused the US of intransigence as practically no progress had been made in the matter since the Indian Prime Minister's US visit, and informed them that public pressure on the Government for immediate action in East Pakistan had mounted to such a degree that it was not possible to hold back the Indian armed forces much longer. When advised by the US Ambassador, on behalf of the US Government, that India follow a conciliatory approach,

the Indian Prime Minister said India could not afford to follow advice that weakened her.

Towards the end of November, Pakistan had intensified its pressure on the US, quoting the agreements drawn between them from time to time and the assurances advanced by the US Government which, according to Pakistan, was obliged to come to its aid by actually joining the hostilities from its side. The State Department, however, disagreed.

On 1 December the US Government placed a ban on issue of new licences for military equipment to India.

The Pakistani public which had been fed on false propaganda by successive military regimes, apparently clamoured for military action. I quote a passage from an account by Fazal Muqeem: Bengali leaders, at that time in West Pakistan, were openly accusing Yahya of pacifism. The independent press was urging Yahya Khan to act quickly. Military wives in at least one cantonment, Multan, threatened to send bangles and henna to the President and the COS Army. One corps commander had walked into the office of the COS Army and said: 'Do you know what officers and jawans are saying about you? They feel that you are funking!'

The coterie believed that hostilities had to be taken to the open, and the scope of the conflict broadened, if for no other reason than to force their allies to act on their behalf. Pakistani formations and units had already moved to the battle locations on 4 September; Indians did that on 9 September. Pakistan had had enough time to rehearse the role of their holding formations as well as the strike force. Now it was only a question of giving them the go signal. Their military operations directorate had suggested the date as 30 November. There was some discussion and it was finally agreed that 3 December would be the day when hostilities would be opened against India, in the style the Israelis did in June 1967. The idea of lightning pre-emptive strike had apparently been put across by their Air Force, with this difference that while the Israelis had attacked at dawn, the Pakistanis had decided to attack at dusk. A similar time of attack in 1965 had caught the Indians off their guard and brought

substantial success to the Pakistani initial move. 3 December was a full-moon night, and it was a Friday.

The US Government wanted to raise the matter in the Security Council, but no one seemed to be in favour of it then. India was bent upon solving the issue once and for all and did not want to be embarrassed by any interference from any quarter; the Security Council would, at best, have pressed for an immediate cessation of hostilities, sidetracking the main issue, leaving the problem boiling for eternity. Pakistan did not want the issue raised as it would have put them in adverse light on account of the atrocities committed by their army on their own countrymen in East Bengal. The Soviets could foresee that the Security Council propsals would be unacceptable to India, and they would, therefore, have to resort to the veto, which situation they wanted to avoid. China was for following the Pakistani line in this matter.

On 2 December, Pakistan invoked the 1959 Agreement with the US. The State Department said that the US was under no obligation to take up cudgels on the side of Pakistan, that under the 1958 Eisenhower Doctrine for the Midle East, the US was not to side with India or Pakistan in the event of a war between them. The President, however, was annoyed with India and ordered cancellation of the remaining licences for the purchase of military equipment. He also wanted all economic aid to India cut off, and the State Deaprtment to issue a statement condemning India.

On 4 December, the US Ambassador to the UN, George Bush, moved a resolution at the Security Council, calling for cease-fire by India and Pakistan, and withdrawal of their forces to their respective sides of the international border. The resolution was supported by 11 nations, and India was saved the embarrassment by the Soviet veto. On the same day the Indian Prime Minister, while addressing the nation on All India Radio, said that India was on a war footing. Later, while addressing Parliament, she regretted that Pakistan did not desist from the ultimate folly. General Yahya, speaking to his people on Pakistan Radio, said in Urdu,: "The time has come for the heroic Mujahids, the soldiers of Islam, to give a crushing reply to the enemy....Attack the enemy. Tell him

that every Pakistani is ready to die for his country!" After the Soviet veto in the Security Council the US took the case to the General Assembly, and it was put to vote on 7 December. It was supported by 104 nations with 11 against, opposition being only from India and the Soviet bloc countries. Great Britain and France had abstained from voting in the Security Council as well as the General Assembly.

On 5 December, in a statement issued by **Tass**, the Soviets held Pakistan responsible for the war, and warned other countries, including China, to avoid getting involved.

On 6 December India recognised Bangla Desh, and the US Government announced stoppage of economic aid to India. Pressure also started being mounted on the Soviets to relent in their support to India. They were told this was likely to have an adverse impact on the efforts to improve the US-Soviet relations. Nixon was annoyed with Russia, for he expected them to be neutral. He felt they were not exerting even a restraining influence. Late in the evening, the Soviet reply to a note earlier given by Kissinger, was received, and its pro-India tone so irked the US President that he ordered a slowdown in the economic negotiations with them.

By 7 December Pakistan had fired nearly all its shots, and nearly everything had happened in their favour. They had one last item left, however: the much-talked-about strike by their counter attack force! Yahya did not seem to expect much out of it, but the publicity it had received about its capability and punch power, put him under a lot of pressure. Nevertheless, he informed the US on 7 December that East Pakistan was disintegrating. Around the same time the US media, led by the **Washington Post**, accused the Government of being unfair in calling India the aggressor and cutting off the economic aid, and cancelling the remaining export licences for military equipment worth around $11.5 million. Senator Edward Kennedy said: "The war did not begin last week with military border crossings, or last month with the escalation of artillery cross-fire. This war began on the bloody night of March 25 with the brutal suppression by the Pakistan Army of the results of a free election." A strong

section of public opinion accused the Administration of being pro-Pakistan and not doing enough to get the Pakistan Government to create conditions favourable to the return of the refugees. In reply, the Administration repeated what it had said earlier, that the Pakistan Government had already announced the time table for return to the civilian rule, that it was not necessary for the two countries to go to war against each other to resolve the issue.

7 December was a critical day in the history of Bangla operations. In East Pakistan, Pakistan Air Force had been knocked out of action the previous day. Jessore had fallen without a fight, with almost 6,000 tons of ammunition and other supplies fallen into Indian hands. The river Karatoya was crossed by the Indians and the important nodal point of Pirganj was gone. An Indian battalion was menacingly launched south of Sylhet. All the resistance points on way to the line of Baulai-Meghna had been reduced, and the Indian drive to Chittagong was well on its way. In a matter of five days the essential props of Pakistani defences had dropped like nine pins. On this day a message was received by the Pakistani President from Governor Malik, describing the situation as desperate. He said that on account of the Indian successes, the Mukti Bahini had become bolder and administration very difficult. He suggested that mere verbal assurances from the US or China were not enough; there had to be physical intervention. He was of the opinion that if physical intervention was not forthcoming in the next 48 hours, negotiations must be opened with rebel Bengalis for peaceful transfer of power, and all unnecessary bloodshed avoided. The President assured the Governor that everything possible was being done.

The pressure to fire the counter attack was mounting. The precondition for its launching was the securing of the objectives in India by the holding formations so as to totally or nearly eliminate the possibility of a major Indian reaction which could threaten the security of the Pakistan armed forces, or that of the country as a whole. The counter offensive could, therefore, be launched only after the Indian reserves had been committed. The hard core idea was that the thrusts by the holding formations, based on the locally-created reserves, would be so

powerful as to deceive India into believing that the main thrust of the counter offensive had been launched, and, thus, prompt her into committing her reserves prematurely. Chinese military intervention was also an important factor in taking the decision about launching the offensive. As it happened, the attacks of the holding formations lacked the necessary punch and were contained by the Indians with their locally-created reserves. In a few places the Pakistanis fared badly, and to restore the situation, units and formations had to be taken from the strike force itself. And then nothing happened from the side of the Chinese. It was soon becoming clear to the Pakistan military leadership that if the hostilities continued, they would run out of resources, and even West Pakistan might get exposed to dismemberment.

In order to relieve East Pakistan of the Indian military pressure, Pakistan General Headquarters was repeatedly asked to unleash the super strike, but the COS Army pacified the agitated protagonists by saying that he would need some more time to make up his mind. On the ground, at this stage, the Pakistan Army was under heavy Indian pressure. On 8 December both Pakistan 1 Corps and 18 Infantry Division had to be reinforced with a brigade each from 33 Infantry Division, a formation of the strike corps. Apart from this depletion, the Indian armoured division was totally unemployed, waiting at Kot Kapura, south of Ferozepur, for the suitable opportunity, which would have surely arisen had the Pakistanis committed their reserves for the counter offensive.

East Pakistan was indeed crumbling. The doctrine that the defence of the East would be taken care of by the offensive in the West, started appearing totally phoney to the soldiers fighting to defend East Pakistan. There was no direct help forthcoming from the US or China. The local population was so hostile that any movement outside the defensive perimeters was almost impossible. The Air Force was dead. The Naval gunboats had long vanished out of existence, and the Indian Navy had effectively blocked the sea routes and ports of Khulna and Chittagong. Only naive and obdurate Pakistani soldiers could, at this stage, hope to retain East Bengal in Pakistan. By 9 December, Jessore having been taken, the two Indian divisions of 2 Corps were pushing the two brigades of Pakistan 9 Infantry Division

towards Kushtia-Hardinge bridge in the north and Khulna in the south. Faridpur lay almost totally exposed. In the north-western sector, between Ganga and main Brahmaputra, Indian 33 Corps had taken Pirganj and Palashbari and contacted Gaibanda. In both these sectors Pakistan troops were totally committed, and nothing could be pulled out for any other task anywhere, including the defence of Dacca. In the northern sector, between Brahmaputra and Meghna, the Indians had liquidated the Pakistani border posts and had concentrated around Jamalpur. In the sector east of the Meghna, the Indian 4 Corps had not only taken nearly all territory east of the river, but with MI-4 helicopters, had landed a force across the river, aiming directly at Dacca. This landing was totally unexpected and had a shattering impact on the morale of officers and soldiers, particularly those who had families or other permanent interests in Dacca or elsewhere.

How was Dacca to be defended? Barring 93 Infantry Brigade engaged in fighting the Indians in Jamalpur-Mymensingh area, and Headquarters 14 Infantry Division and remnants of 27 Infantry Brigade at Bhairab Bazar, there was no force located on the correct side of the rivers, to take on the defence of Dacca in a hurry. When the Divisional Headquarters at Bhairab Bazar was contacted for sparing troops, they said they could not as the Indians were already blocking the way. Similar requests were turned down by the commanders of the garrisons at Maynamati and Sylhet. That left only 93 Brigade. Orders were issued to it on 10 December to withdraw to Dacca with a view to defending it. But this formation just could not secure a clean break and their withdrawal degenerated into a running fight, Indians following close on the heels, and entering Dacca almost alongside them. On 10 December Niazi informed Rawalpindi that the situation was hopeless. In the meantime, the Indian Army Chief had broadcast on 8 December a message to the Pakistani troops in East Pakistan, asking them to surrender without fear of reprisals. The broadcast said that their situation was hopeless, and was repeated on 11 December and subsequent days. Simultaneously, air action for interdiction of Dacca was intensified. On 9 December Governor Malik contacted Rawalpindi for Presidential approval to certain proposals seeking to end the fighting and handing over government to the elected representatives. The President

said that he would leave the matter to the judgement of the Governor; apparently the Governor had assured the President that the final solution would not go beyond the level of the six points and provincial autonomy. Consequently, on 10 December he sent detailed proposals to the President for a peaceful transfer of power under UN supervision to the elected representatives in East Pakistan, and withdrawal of all troops, Indian as well as Pakistani, from the country. Since the proposals were virtually deemed to have been approved by the President, one copy was passed on to the representative of the UN General Secretary at Dacca, who flashed it to the Secretariat at New York. Immediately on receipt, the US Government came to know of it, and although the State Department was satisfied with the outcome - the affair had caused a lot of friction between the Department and White House - the White House was suffused wth apprehension. If East Pakistan collapsed, as it had, India would immediately transfer her forces to the West and dismember that part of Pakistan as well. The main concern at the White House was the part of Kashmir under the illegal occupation of Pakistan. According to their intelligence, India had plans to take this territory by force. Therefore, any surrender in the east had to be accompanied by a cease-fire in the west. The White House accordingly briefed the Pakistan ambassador, Raza, and the offer to surrender was withdrawn.

On 10 December Nixon ordered the move of the US Naval Task Force led by USS Enterprise towards the Bay of Bengal; this force had already been put on the alert earlier. Ostensibly, this force was moved to evacuate US citizens in East Pakistan, but basically the idea was to give heart to the Pakistanis to hold on a while longer, till India had given up the idea of any aggression in the West and agreed to a cease-fire there. Additionally, the move was calculated to tell India and her allies, particularly the Soviets, that the US Government would not be indifferent to any move directed towards the dismemberment of West Pakistan, including occupied Kashmir. However, the Soviets told the Indians that they were ordering their naval units into the Bay as a counter-measure.

Pressure on the Pakistani strike force was now mounting from all quarters. After doling away with nearly

the whole of 33 Division to stabilise the front, the Pakistan Military Operations Directorate produced a revised plan which was approved on 13 December, and it was decided to mount the attack on 16 December. In the meantime, to keep East Pakistan from a total collapse, they were informed on the morning of 12 December, in a roundabout manner, that both China and America would be soon there to help Pakistan. But Eastern Command who already had the hangman's noose around their neck by then, wanted to know how soon, and they were told the 'friends' would be there by 13 December. The following day they were told the move had been delayed by 48 hours; this time was given possibly to synchronise with the launching of the counter-offensive. But it appears General Niazi and his team were not impressed by this assurance, for they felt certain the end would come well before the promised time of arrival of the 'friends'.

Bhutto met the US Presidential advisor, Henry Kissinger, on the morning of 11 December at a posh suit in New York city. As Kissinger recalls in his book, "The White House Years," the meeting place was so elegant that one forgot that 8000 miles away his (Bhutto's) country's fate hung by a thread. Kissinger told him that mock tough rhetoric was not likely to solve the problem, nor should time be wasted in posturing for history books. It was agreed at this meeting that in the event of no response from Moscow, who had been asked to get an assurance from India that West Pakistan would not be dismembered, the matter would be referred to the Security Council with a demand for a cease-fire and withdrawal of Indian troops, but that, ultimately, it would settle for a cease-fire **in situ**, accepting the **fait accompli** precipitated by India in East Bengal.

On 12 December the Soviets informed the US Government, in response to the pressure mounted by the latter, that their Deputy Foreign Minister had been despatched to New Delhi to arrange for a satisfactory outcome of the problem. Both Russia and India assured the White House that India had no designs on West Pakistan, but when it came to occupied Kashmir, both were silent. The Indian Foreign Minister was in New York then, voicing India's objection to the return of the matter to the UN. Around the middle of the day, Huang Hua, the Chinese Ambassador to the

UN, rang up Kissinger to say that he wanted an urgent meeting with him. It was feared at the White House that, perhaps, the Chinese were on the point of opening hostilities in support of Pakistan. The US President felt that interference by China would invite Soviet retaliation, and, since the US could not afford to be indifferent to any form of Russian aggression against China, that could precipitate a situation where the US might be forced to use a deterring nuclear device. The Chinese, however, said that they were for a political solution on the lines that Kissinger had earlier given to Hua, in accordance with the UN procedures and principles. This also resulted in the holding back of the Seventh Fleet for 24 hours, to give time to the Soviets to inform the US about the results of their efforts in New Delhi; the Fleet was held east of the Strait of Malacca, 24 hours from the Bay of Bengal. The US was mounting pressure on the Soviets to influence India and get her to give up her plans against West Pakistan, including occupied Kashmir.

The Security Council met on 12 December, but it was obvious that nothing was likely to come out of this, for by now, Indians were fairly in command of the situation in their march to Dacca and any resolution against India would surely have been vetoed. Bhutto, who was representing his country as its Foreign Minister, delivered a bitter, blistering speech, and walked out. "I will not take back a document of surrender from the Security Council," he said. "I will not be a party to the legalisation of aggression. For four days Security Council has procrastinated. Why? Because the object was for Dacca to fall." He concluded his speech thus: "Why should I waste my time here in the Security Council? I will not be a party to the ignominious surrender of a part of my country. You can take your Security Council. Here you are, I am going!"

Governor Malik's proposal for a cease-fire, as mentioned earlier, was sought to be given out as having emanated from confusion, without the sanction of the Federal Government, although the proposal was withdrawn primarily under the pressure of the US. Rao Farman Ali (Major General), advisor to the Governor, who had handed over the copy of the message to the UN representative at Dacca, felt aggrieved because the talk was that he was the

author of the proposal, and sought permission to issue a clarification, failing which, he said, to vindicate his honour, he would ask for a court martial. However, the storm in the teacup notwithstanding, the Pakistan army in East Bengal had no fight left in them, and Headquarters Eastern Command had no illusions about it. Therefore, when the canard about the 'yellow' nation and 'white' nation coming to their help was given to them (in Pushto, over the telephone), they did not mince their words about the prevailing difficult situation. The date, 13 December, was flashed to all the units, so much so that when the Indians para-landed at Tangail, the Pakistani troops in the area rushed forward to greet the drop thinking they were Chinese.

The troops in East Pakistan had lost their will to fight. They had been up against the rebels for too long, and they were tired. They had been sent to the east to fight an insurgency, not the Indians. They were told that there would be the Chinese and the Americans helping them, that the counter offensive in the west woul bring the Indians down on their knees. Nothing of the sort happened. There had been cases when troops, when ordered to fight, put up white flags and surrendered. In Sylhet, orders to dislodge the battalion of Indians heli-lifted to Mirapara, a place immediately south of the town, were disregarded by officers as well as troops. The garrison at Bhairab Bazar, when asked to move south for the defence of the Dacca bowl, refused to do so, like the garrison at Maynamati who refused to spare even a battalion worth of troops. There had been cases when troops had fired at each other while resolving the issue of surrender. Such occurrences, perhaps, would not have been there had the troops been fighting to defend their own home soil. To the West Pakistani Army, East Bengal was like a foreign country!

Rawalpindi knew about it, and Washington also knew about it. The situation was of intense gravity, but surrender had to await cease-fire in the West.

14. 4 Corps— The concluding phase

While the Pakistanis had all but thrown in the towel in East Bengal, the Indians were crawling. In the 2 Corps sector, instead of making for Faridpur, and thence for Dacca, the two Indian Divisions went north and south, hunting down the retreating Pakistani brigades. In the 33 Corps sector too the approach of the Indians was not much different. Their aim here was to engage the Pakistanis and follow them wherever they went, with a view to destroying their fighting capability, without due regard to the overall aim, which was the liberation of East Bengal. It appears that the Indian formations had no idea that Dacca was defenceless, that the Pakistani morale in the eastern wing, was in the boots. If Army Headquarters or Headquarters Eastern Command had any idea, they chose not to take advantage of the situation. No doubt they mustered courage and decided to venture towards Dacca, which was not visualised in the original plan, but they could have been bolder, much bolder! All along various thrusts, operating independently in various sectors, continued doing so till the last day, and little effort appears to have been made to coordinate them with a view to jointly exerting pressure at the point from where the decision could be expected: the Dacca bowl.

311 Mountain Brigade of 57 Mountain Division of 4 Corps crossed the Meghna during the night of 9/10 December, putting across an infantry battalion and a troop of light guns with MI-4 helicopters (14 had been allocated for the purpose, and, on an average, 10 were available for actual ferrying), while another battalion crossed the river in country craft to protect the heli-landing (at Raipura) against a flank threat from the Pakistan garrison at Bhairab Bazar, barely 8 kilometres north-east of the landing area. Bhairab Bazar saw all this happening right under their nose, but chose to look the other way. A substantial part of the garrison had had a stiff encounter

with the Indians only that morning and were perhaps still nursing their wounds. The build-up of the Indians from across the river, from Brahmanbaria, continued upto 14 December, with helicopters and country craft. Four infantry battalions along with Brigade Headquarters had crossed over by 11 December, and by 14 December additionally one troop of light tanks, one mountain regiment less battery, one light battery, four medium guns with Krauz tractors and one platoon of engineers, had also gone across.

In support of the heli-borne operation, the engineers were required to devise the means to put across the Meghna troops, guns, armour and engineer plant. The rail and road bridges over the Titas channel south of Brahmanbaria had been demolished, and five steamers were stuck on the wrong side of the bridges which totally blocked the channel with their demolished, fallen girders (of the railway bridge) and reinforced concrete debris (of the road bridge). One end of the span of the railway bridge rested on the pier while the other was in the middle of the channel. The engineers carried out a massive operation to deepen the channel close to the pier, using over 2,000 labourers and a whole engineer regiment; at this stage 59 Division was being supported by almost two additional regiments over and above the divisional engineers. The pier end of the span could not be detonated as that would have totally blocked the channel. Side by side the engineers put up a 120-foot Bailey bridge over the partly demolished road bridge. By 13 December the channel had been sufficiently deepened and three light steamers had been moved to Gokarna Ghat, on the Meghna, west of Brahmanbaria. The road bridge was up by 11 December; one day was lost in collecting the equipment for the bridge - since capture of territory north of Titas, in area Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj was not there in the original plan, no bridging equipment was available for it close at hand.

While the channel was being deepened, we had moved up the Bailey rafting equipment, and 234 Army Engineer Regiment had constructed five class 18 rafts; they had earlier made five or six class 5 rafts for ferrying troops and stores across the Titas channel. In the class 18 rafts we loaded two Kraz tractors and four medium guns along with their first line of ammunition, and in the steamers went

the manpower and rations and other stores, and by first light on 15 December all this had been offloaded at Narsingdi, across the Meghna, and was available for deployment. The river craft then returned to Gokarna to ferry more weapons, equipment and troops.

The second brigade of 57 Division (73 Mountain Brigade) was across the Meghna by 14 December. The first brigade, 311 Mountain Brigade, had captured Narsingdi on 11 December, and advanced to Lakhya river, after crossing a channel called the Brahmaputra, contacted the east bank of Lakhya on 13 December, and captured the west bank on 14 December. 73 Brigade advanced from Narsingdi and made contact with Tungi on 14 December, after crossing the Lakhya. At this stage the Brigade was ordered to hold firm to avoid a clash with 101 Communications Zone Area who were taking Tungi from the West.

301 Mountain Brigade of 23 Division, after it had secured Chandpur on 9 December, was asked to concentrate at Daudkandi starting from 12 December. During 14 and 15 December two battalions were heli-lifted to Baidya Bazar while the remaining Brigade moved by road/steamers. By 15 December the Brigade was ready to march forward.

The situation on 15 December was that 311 Brigade having crossed Lakhya at Demra was ready to enter Dacca, while 73 Mountain Brigade was on top of Kurmitola cantonment, and 301 Brigade at Baidya Bazar was about to set off for the crossing of Lakhya. From the west the Communication Zone Area was racing down from Kaliakair to Sabhar, towards the bridge on the Turag at Mirpur, to capture it. The noose around Dacca was complete.

At the international level, US pressure on the Soviets was mounting by the hour; the latter, as well as the Indian Government, were waiting for the unconditional surrender by the Pakistanis in East Pakistan without which, if the hostilities had ceased, the entire problem would have swung back to square one. In his book "Witness to Surrender", Saddiq Salik of Pakistan Army has said: "Major General Farman Ali, generally considered to be the author of these proposals (of cease-fire, sent by Governor Malik on 10 December to Yahya, for the latter's approval), told me later that the step aimed at nothing but obtaining a

cease-fire "to allow our commanders to reorganise their forces and regain their poise. What we meant by a government of the people's representatives, he said, 'was that all those available pro-Pakistani MNAs and MPAs who were elected in the general elections of 1970, or subsequent by-elections, would be installed in power. If India treated it as a betrayal and resumed hostilities, we would have faced her with renewed energies'."

Irrespective of the intent to defraud India, the US Government had, by then, made up its mind to accept the emergence of Bangla Desh, and bring the issue to a speedy close - any undue prolongation was likely to complicate matters vis-a-vis the Soviets and the Chinese. The Indian Army Chief's message asking the Pakistanis in East Bengal to surrender and save their lives and families, without any danger of reprisals, was being broadcast by the hour by All India Radio. It was being said that both the US and the Soviets were concerned about the slow pace of the Indian forces. Everyone wanted the operations to end.

On 13 December the Soviet Embassy in Washington informed the US Government, because of the pressure mounted by the latter, that an appraisal of the situation was under way and results thereof would be communicated shortly. This was interpreted as a ruse to gain time for the Indians. On 14 December Kissinger told the press aboard Air Force One, while flying home from President Nixon's meeting with President Pompidou in the Azores, that, considering the attitude of the Soviets, the US would have to re-evaluate the entire relationship, including the desirability for holding the Summit. The next day, however, Ziegler, the President's White House spokesman, clarified that the Summit was not in jeopardy, that no Government official intended to suggest this. By 16 December positive indications had come to the US Government that the Soviets were exerting pressure on India for accepting the status quo in the West, including Jammu and Kashmir.

During those days the only people Yahya saw were the American and Chinese ambassadors; sometimes he saw them more than once a day. He seemed to have sunk into gloom and left his heavily-guarded Headquarters only once - to play golf with his son. Even though the cease-fire proposal of

10 December had been repudiated by Rawalpindi, and they had advanced assurance of help from their 'yellow friends' and 'white friends', the Government at Dacca was going through a travail of unprecedented magnitude, and was not prepared to be placated with false assurances and idle rhetoric. On 12 December another message was sent to the President emphasising the gravity of the situation and asking him "to do everything possible to save the innocent lives."

Nothing happened on 13 December except that Bhutto supporters at Rawalpindi started saying that the case at the Security Council had been weakened irreparably on account of the Governor's cease-fire proposal of 10 December. During the night of 13/14 December General Niazi rang up the Army Chief (General Hamid) and requested him to get an early decision from the President regarding the proposals sent on 12 December. On 14 December the Governor was holding an important meeting at the Government House when, at 1115 hours (local time), three Indian MIGs attacked the place and a rocket tore through the roof of the main hall. There was no loss of life, but that was the ultimate that the Government of Governor Malik could take, and they immediately submitted their resignations and sought the protection of the Red Cross in Hotel Intercontinental; the writing on the wall was totally clear by then and, being Bengalis, they had no problem in deciding what was in their best interest. And that was the final act that brutally tore apart whatever mask Rawalpindi was wearing under whatever pressure. At 1400 hours (Indian time) the same day, the Pakistan President responded with an unclassified signal to Lieutenant General Niazi, praising him for the brave fight that he and his troops had put up, and asking him to take immediate steps to stop the fighting and preserve the lives of the armed forces personnel, and all others from West Pakistan, and all loyal elements, and informing him that he had moved the UN to urge India to stop hostilities in East Pakistan and guarantee the safety of the armed forces personnel and others who might be the likely targets of miscreants.

The message was received in Dacca at 1500 hours (Indian time), and soon thereafter Niazi contacted the American Consulate for passing the surrender message to the Indian Army Chief. The surrender offer was, however,

subject to certain conditions, they being: safety of the Pakistan armed forces personnel and paramilitary personnel and their regrouping in mutually agreed areas, protection of loyal civilians against reprisals, safety and medical care of the sick and the wounded, and safety of all West Pakistanis settled in the east since 1947.

The US Consulate, instead of sending the message to New Delhi, sent it to Washington, and the US Government got in touch with Yahya, and transmitted the message to New Delhi only after Yahya's confirmation had been obtained. At the same time, the US Government was also awaiting the results of the Soviet pressure on India for acceptance of territorial status quo in the West, and the clearance to surrender was given by the US Government only after it had received indication of positive results. New Delhi got the message on 15 December although surrender indications had started coming much earlier through intercepted messages. After receipt of the intercepts, Indian bombardment activity over Dacca and the area around had been intensified. In fact, even the bombing of the Government House had been effected on the basis of an intercept which suggested a government meeting was scheduled for 1200 hours.

The Indian Army Chief, though advancing assurances on All India Radio to Pakistani solidiers in East Bengal, that the Indian Army would strictly adhere to the Geneva Convention, and that there would be no reprisals, nonetheless demanded an unconditional surrender. By the evening the Pakistan Army Chief had advised Niazi to accept cease-fire on Indian terms "as they meet your requirements. However, it will be a local arrangement between the two commanders. If it conflicts with the solution being sought at the United Nations, it will be null and void."

A temporary cease-fire was agreed to from 1700 hours on 15 December to 0900 hours on 16 December, to discuss the conditions stipulated by the Indian Army Chief. This was extended to 1500 hours on 16 December at the request of General Niazi, which had been received at New Delhi at 0800 hours when the Indian Army was getting ready to reopen hotilities with renewed vigour. It is not clear why this extension was sought, or what was required to be

discussed. The most probable explanation is that the US Government wanted to be fully assured of the Indian cease-fire on the western front. After all, the only purpose of the US Seventh Fleet lurking in the Bay of Bengal was to ensure the safety and integrity of West Pakistan, including occupied Kashmir.

At 0900 hours Major General Nagra, the General Officer Commanding the Communication Zone Area, was at the Mirpur bridge leading into Dacca, and in a jeep with a white flag he sent a message to Niazi, asking him to surrender, assuring him that he would be looked after. An hour and a half later the jeep returned, followed by Major General Jamshed in a staff car, and by 1100 hours, Nagra was with Niazi.

Around midday, Major General Jacob, Chief of Staff of Eastern Command at Calcutta, arrived with the surrender deed, and early in the afternoon Niazi drove to the Dacca airport to receive Lieutenant General Aurora, General Officer Commanding in Chief, Eastern Command, who was accompanied by his wife, and the surrender deed was signed by Aurora and Niazi at the Ramna Race Course (Suhrawardy Ground, where Mujib had first announced his six points) at about 1630 hours local time, in the presence of approximately one million raucous, slogan-shouting Bengalis.

15. After the war

On 14 December we, the Corps Headquarters, moved from Teliamura, in Tripura, to Comilla in East Bengal. After the day's work at Brahmanbaria-Gokarna Ghat area I arrived at Comilla pretty late in the night, and from there to get to the Headquarters, after winding through the dark streets of the town, took quite a while. At that hour the streets were deserted and only here and there we came across an odd individual who guided us. There was no sign of our army men or Pakistani army men. Here and there we went through streets which were electrically lit, while at one place we went past what must have been a Hindu temple of Goddess Kali and where the devotees were emitting some kind of ululation as part of the prayer. Muffled booming of the guns some kilometres away, did not seem to have any impact on them. We made it to the officers' mess of the Corps Headquarters. There were no lights and it was pitch dark. After a lot of shouting and banging on doors, ultimately a waiter came out, and he said that the living quarters were somewhere else. So we took him along and drove on through any number of streets till, for the first time, we sited what looked like a barricade. A sleepy guard rose from a stool standing on the roadside, a sten carbine carelessly slung on his shoulder, and slowly walked up while I dived for my weapon, but before I had trained it on him, he said: 'Ram, Ram!' He told us we could not go beyond, because after a couple of kilometres we would be right in the midst of the Pakistani defences. I cursed, turned, and followed the direction the guard had given, and then our guide from the oficers' mess got back his sense of direction, and after winding around the streets, and turning a few bends, we made it to a badly maintained double-storey building which, in that darkness, looked like a tourist rest house of some overcrowded city in India. The place was in a complete mess, with scores of people lying about in opiated slumber, their weapons and ammunition scattered about unattended, the entire place

smelling of filth, diesel and urine. No one challenged us; three Pakistanis would have been enough to slaughter the whole shagged-out bunch. After some search my driver managed to get hold of my staff officer who, in his lungi and banyan (being a Bengali), did not look much different from the people lying about on the floor and the drive, and he came while still in the process of pulling himself out of sleep. He flashed a smile nonetheless, and guided me to the steps leading to the first floor; the steps bore a mouldy look and were partly wet, and I could not decide whether it was water or urine which had made them so. The room was small and had curtains which, in the torchlight that my staff officer had, looked as if anything and everything must have been wiped with them. My batman materialised, and I was peeved at the way he had organised things, and while he got down to rearranging the room, I peeped into the one adjoining. This was occupied by the Commander of the Corps Artillery. A dim hurricane lantern stood on an upturned shell canister. The Brigadier sat on the canvas camp cot - he obviously had rejected the local cots - and on a table improvised out of ammunition boxes - the top was covered with a barrack blanket - stood a quarter filled bottle of Indian whisky. The Brigadier was drinking in spite of the late hour. His room had fairly clean curtains, the floor was well swept and everything looked nice and tidy in that dim light. Seeing me at the door he put down the half-filled glass and told me to walk in. I said what a bloody mess the whole arrangement was, and he said the whole damned operation had been conducted in a hell of an ad-hoc, slipshod manner. Apart from other factors, his one grouse was that the Corps Commander was flitting about the sector without taking his artillery advisor with him, or taking him into confidence, and the Corps staff took a perverted glee in keeping him, and others like him, in the dark. He then picked up his sten carbine lying next to him - I never realised it was loaded and cocked - and the next instant a whole burst spouted out of the barrel, hitting the opposite wall, smashing a ventilator. That was his way of giving vent to his grievance. But once the dust in the room had settled down, he grinned and offered me a drink. In no time his batman appeared out of a shadow outside the room, and there was a drink for me, and the Brigadier was reminiscing about the Second World War, and the great organisers that the British were. Then he sang, and I joined him, and we ended on a happy note.

What hit me when I went back to my room was the dark, batty kind of odour that normally hangs over places which might not have been aired for a long time. I was tired, and after waving away determined, whining mosquitoes for some time, went to sleep.

Early on 16 December morning I flew with the Corps Commander to Narsingdi. The Brigade Commander was out, but the staff were painting a hopeful picture, though they had a lot of enemy pockets to indicate on the map. There were some foreign correspondents who were keen on meeting the Corps Commander, who generally shied from such publicity. I was happy to know the four medium guns with ammunition and the two Kraz tractors were in position and were ready to pound Dacca the moment the temporary cease-fire was lifted. The Divisional Engineers had, after continuous work overnight, prepared the advance landing ground at Narsingdi for the Caribous to bring in supplies and personnel, but, at the last minute, the Air Force had not given their approval on some kind of technical grounds. The steamers with rafts in tow, had already gone back to bring more guns, personnel, ammunition and light tanks. Some light tanks were already in, brought in from Daudkandi in steamers.

The idea of my accompanying the Corps Commander was to assess the engineer problem likely to be confronted within the crossings of the rivers Brahmaputra and Lakhya, the two obstacles between Narsingdi and Dacca. Although our troops had gone upto Lakhya and secured its western bank at Demra, the requirement was to have a smooth flow of stores, ammunition, vehicles, guns, tanks, personnel, when the march to Dacca was resumed. This Brahmaputra, the third in East Bengal, was even smaller than the one at Jamalpur, but was big enough to be an obstacle of some reckoning. Its span varied between 100 feet to around 300 feet, decreasing even further in the upper reaches, till north of Narsingdi it was only a marsh, while further north the marsh was so firm in stretches that even bullock carts could negotiate it. But we were interested in stretches around Araihazar, where the water span was around 200 feet. Further to the east of this river Lakhya was a major channel of over 500 feet span around Demra. I gave instructions for the movement of boats and rafts, whatever were readily available. The Engineers were already in the process of commandeering as many civil boats and ferries as possible.

Whatever plan I made was from whatever knowledge I had acquired during the brief flight in the chopper that had brought us, and whatever information my engineers and troops who had been to the obstacles, could give me. Barely had I formulated the plan and passed the instructions when the Brigade Signals intercepted a message being passed to the Corps Headquarters. Basically the message said that the Pakistanis would surrender at Dacca at 1630 hours, and that the Corps Commander would have to be there. We walked back to the helipad, the Corps Commander exchanging a few pleasantries with the foreign press. En route we passed by a section of Baluch prisoners of war, squatted on the ground with hands on their heads, a couple of them exchanging a joke amongst themselves, their Rajasthani guard, carbine slung on the shoulder, disinterestedly watching the distant horizon.

At Corps Headquarters there was a lot of excitement, but no festivities or jubilation. There was a lot of talking and a lot of laughter, and no one missed the opportunity to stake his claim for his contribution to the successful completion of the operations.Even the mess cook said things could have gone wrong if he had not cooked the way he did. He had a point there. The boot-maker said the Corps Commander would have been rendered immobile if he had not repaired his boots in good time. He too had nis point!

Colonel Osmani, C-in-C Bangla Desh, had arrived to fly with the Corps Commander. Others to fly were the two principal staff officers, the Chief Signal Officer, and the senior Air Force officer at the Headquarters. Osmani sat erect and serious. I congratulated him and he nodded, taking my hand, cocking his eyes like a Field Marshal. The glint in his eyes suggested that he was proud and satisfied - which he deserved to be - that he had made a major contribution in getting the Pakistanis to lay down their arms. He indeed had made a significant contribution.

The surrender took place as scheduled; All India Radio gave a fairly good account of it. In the evening there was a message from the Corps Commander that he wanted to meet me at Dacca the following day. The staff at the Headquarters told me a chopper had been detailed for the purpose, that it would also carry a mess detachment for the General

Officer Commanding, and would leave early the following morning. The next morning I waited for over an hour at the Comilla air field (it had been cratered by the Pakistanis and we had had it repaired in a matter of five days by a task force comprising engineers and the Border Roads Organisation) till an MI-4 helicopter picked me up. The Group Captain and the Wing Commander of the Headquarters were already in the chopper; the Groupie had accompanied the Corps Commander's party the previous day, but had returned in the evening. Dacca airport was armed to the teeth when we landed there, barrels of rifles and machine guns sticking out from all over, and troops sporting carbines standing about in bunches on the tar macadam. And all Pakistanis! They had been permitted to keep their weapons for self-protection. A couple of Indian Air Force officers arrived just as we touched down, and the chopper crew and the two Air Force officers who had come with me, left with them, their mission and destination undisclosed: the Corps Commander's messing detachment had left by road very early in the morning. That left just me on the tarmac, not knowing where to get the transport to go to wherever the Corps Commander was. Just then a smart Pakistani Military Police officer showed up, almost from nowhere, saluted smartly, and said that he had come for 23 Division Commander, and whether I would know where he could find him. I said I was neither in touch with him, nor did I know of his movements, but that I needed some transport to get to the Indian Corps Headquarters. The youngster flashed an affable, bright smile and said that he could loan the vehicle he had brought along, to leave me at the Headquarters, but he instructed the driver to return directly after delivering me.

At the Headquarters the Brigadier General Staff said he had no idea why I had been called. So I walked straight to the Corps Commander who had a strikingly neat-looking room for his office; the building vacated by the Pakistanis for the Indian Headquarters was the main Headquarters of their Eastern Command, an elegant, well-kept complex. The Corps Commander looked tired and was reticent, speaking monosyllabically. He said there were three main tasks: remove all mines laid by the Pakistanis in and around Dacca, neutralise the demolition charges on the Mirpur bridge (and other charges if there were any), and repair the Dacca air field. I felt a bit annoyed, for I

could have known about this before leaving Comilla, and could have come somewhat prepared for it, so that some work of preliminary nature could have started straightaway. The Corps Commander said that I could meet the Pakistan Eastern Command Chief Engineer at their Tactical Headquarters and consult him on the magnitude of the problem. We agreed that I would have to go back and then return with the minimum of personnel, equipment and vehicles, to take on the tasks.

Next I went to the Brigadier Incharge Administration and asked for transport. He said he had none. Just then a Pakistani liaison officer dropped in on some errand, and he said he could leave me at the Tactical Headquarters, but no more. I had no option but to accept the offer. On the way the Major said his parents had emigrated from Ludhiana in 1947, that this was his first contact with the Indians, that considering the similarity of language, culture and ethnic background, he did not understand why India and Pakistan bore perpetual hostility against each other. He left me at the barbed wire gate of the Tactical Headquarters, saying I had only to walk in, and there would be no problem. The entire place was heavily wired; there must have been four or five layers of wire fences. There were no guards as such, but there were any number of armed men in khaki. At one place some men were on the midday namaz, the day being a Friday. I must have walked more than 200 yards or so, the lone olive green seen in that camp for the first time, before I was with Brigadier Baqar Siddiqui, their Chief of Staff, a 1947 commissioned officer who started his military training at the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun. A short officer, with a pleasant demeanour, he put me on to the Chief Engineer after we had exchanged the initial pleasantries. The Chief Engineer, Brigadier Sharif, an engineer graduate from Aligarh, appeared to be a straightforward soldier, of a hospitable, friendly disposition. Hardly had I finished introducing myself to Sharif, when a number of other engineer officers also walked in. They were a little tense in the beginning, but after I had told them that, as promised by the Indian Army Chief, they had no cause for any apprehension or fear of reprisals, that they would soon be on their way home, they relaxed. One of them said Indians had no idea how treacherous the Bengalis were, that they would soon be raising accusing fingers at the

Indians as well, as they had done against their own countrymen from West Pakistan. He said a more thankless people did not exist in this world. I said we were hardly bothered. Bangla Desh was an independent country, and Bengalis could do what they liked with their independence.

On the basis of the information given by Brigadier Sharif I made out a plan, and then told him that I would meet him on 19 December, after I had got over some officers and men to execute the tasks. He promised to give whatever assistance he could in terms of equipment and manpower. He gave me his vehicle to drop me at the airport from where I was to fly back, in the helicopter, to Comilla. At the airport we met Ahmad, a voluble Bengali who was keen on us having tea with him. Since his house was not far away from the airport, we went along. His was a rich house, but I was not sure he was happy at the change of government. He seemed to have been fairly well up with the erstwhile administration, and though he talked in disparaging terms about the Punjabis (for example, their saying they were improving the stock of the Bengalis by sleeping with their women), I got the impression that he did not say that from his heart. However, he was kind, and his family seemed to be keen on befriending some senior officers in the Indian Army.

Then we drove back to the airport, via the Kurmitola Cantonment, and it was at once obvious why Ahmad wanted to befriend officers in the Indian Army. Large-scale looting was going on. Hordes of Bengalis had descended on the houses of West Pakistanis, officers and men, and were looting. Even little children were looting, and some (that I saw) wore oversized uniforms of Air Force officers and men, including the peak caps, carrying other items in their hands, or in bundles on their heads.

Back in Comilla I formed a small task force the strength of a field company, with a lot of mechanical equipment operators, and a couple of smart, industrious young majors - all from 62 Engineer Regiment - and got them to move out the first thing the following morning. Our Air Force had promised to heli-lift me and my officers to Dacca. So we went to the Comilla airfield, but after waiting for an hour or so without results, I decided to leave by road with my two Majors, the clerical staff following me in another vehicle.

The Comilla-Daudkandi road was simply packed with vehicles. There were troops moving up in vehicles, and administrative vehicles, even a few guns and light tanks - 57 Mountain Division which had been assigned duties in Dacca, was gathering up its units from across the river. This was 18 December and the following day the entire Pakistani garrison in Dacca was to lay down arms. So troops had priority. Then there were a lot of civilians, some essential officers and staff, some members of the National Assembly, all moving up, also on priority. Along the road stood vehicles which had not moved even an inch in the last 24 hours. I regretted having decided to come by road, and had to do a lot of arguing and shouting to impress upon whosoever were controlling the movement, how important it was for me to get to the other end, fast. At places I had to force my way,making sure that the other vehicles with me were not left out. Ultimately, around midday we were at Daudkandi, and then it was a shade simpler, for the ferries were all being manned by my men. We crossed the Gumti, by now a large river having steamers, then the Meghna, then a couple of other streams, and finally, after crossing the Lakhya, we were on the road to Dacca.

What struck me then were the multitudes - the teeming population. At one place we went past a gathering, most of the people in their neat, white clothes, squatted around a large, wet field, watching some score-odd men, all lined up in the field, catching tiny fishes from the slush, with their baskets. It appeared they had organised some kind of competition. My companion on the second driver's seat, a Major, was highly amused, and observed that the gathering, barely a few miles away from Dacca, the centre of their national activity, hardly seemed to be bothered about the major events their country was going through, and were busy in their sport as if nothing else was important.

Perhaps it was not just that. Perhaps it was genuine exercise to eke out the day's requiremet of food. Governmets may come and go, but a man has to have enough to fill his belly!

As we got closer to Dacca the crowds grew larger. Somewhere we had missed the direct road to the Cantonment, and there were just our two vehicles threading through hordes of people, gun toting militiamen, slogan-shouting

multitudes, and mobs setting fire to and looting the houses and shops that belonged to West Pakistanis - who had by now moved into camps, leaving their property in the charge of Bengali or Bihari chowkidars. Then we were in the midst of a dense pocket of people who were shouting their lungs out and appeared to be voicing some kind of protest, and as my Jonga stopped, one person jumped on to the bonnet and started delivering what sounded like a fiery speech - I did not know the Bengali language - with vigorous gesticulations, while every now and then the crowd responded with menacing shouts. Sensing that the situation could turn ugly I signalled to my men to arm their weapons, though I felt it would be a pity if we had to use them against the Bengalis for whose liberation we had gone through so much. But then that crowd could be of miscreants, who could be up to anything. One had to take precautions! I spotted a bespectacled man - almost middle-aged, short, dark - a short distance away, and called for him, and asked him what the man on the bonnet of my vehicle was telling the crowd. He said quite agitatedly - in English - that a large number of professors, teachers and intellectuals (whatever that meant) had been found murdered on 16 December morning, their bodies thrown in a sewer, and the speaker was telling the crowd that it was the work of Al-Badr, an organisation of Bihari Muslim Razakars, and airing his anguish at the dastardly act. I told him that we were in abject hurry as we had important assignments at the other end, and in next to no time this gentleman was on the bonnet, and he said something to the speaker who instantly turned to me apologetically as if he had just then realised where he was standing, then turned to the crowd and spoke to them, and a way was made for us to go through. Not much later another crowd was upon us, and before we had realised it, we were out of our vehicles, being hugged and kissed, carried on shoulders by dancing, singing, raucous people: joi Bangla; joi Indira; joi India!

We got in late - it was night. The streets were deserted; it was as though the multitude of the day had evaporated and got lost in the heavy Dacca mist. We were driving through a ghost town; occasionally a long, hooting wail of some woman needled through the deathly silence. But in the silence, in that desertion, that darkness, Dacca showed a poise of its own, a quiet dignity. In that

light mist which the descending moisture had cast over the town, when its inhabitants or their litter and garbage, were not visible in the beams of the vehicle headlights, things looked so peaceful, so full of meaning, even bearing a touch of grandeur.

We made it finally to the Circuit House. It had two parts: the main building and the annexe. The care-taker said there was no accommodation in the main building, but he gave us enough rooms in the annexe to accommodate me and my detachment. I walked over to the main building and was pleasantly surprised to learn that the Corps Commander and his two principal staff officers were housed there, though I did wonder why he could not find a more appropriate place for himself and was content staying with the officials and non-officials of the local civil administration. In the lobby I met our mess waiter who gave me a broad welcoming grin, as if we had met after a long time, and informed me that my food had been prepared by the messing detachment. He gave me the room number where the food was to be served, and thither I went, somewhat satisfied that though the ad hoc Corps Headquarters had not made any arrangements for my stay (they had to only say it, as the caretaker told me, and half of the Circuit House would have been reserved for the Corps officers), at least there was food. It was an elegant room, comparable to that in a five-star hotel. But I was an unwanted intrusion. The brigadiers of the Corps Headquarters staff appeared to be too preoccupied amongst themselves. The Corps Commander, when he appeared a while later, spoke as if to a plebian, and broke into Gurkhali with his ADC, admonishing him for letting any tom and tib partake of food prepared by his personal messing detachment. I took a quick bite, was annoyed beyond measure, and went out, and again met the waiter in he lobby who, it seemed to me, had been positioned there by someone to direct any officer arrived from the Corps Headquarters to the messing room upstairs. But this time I could not pull a smile in response to his broad grin.

The annexe accommodation was basically meant for subordinate civil staff, but at that hour it did not matter. The next morning I told my Major to find a suitable place for us close to the ad hoc Corps Headquarters. Then I drove over to the Cantonment to see the Corps Commander. He had nothing more to add to what he had said earlier, except

that the Command wanted the Tezgaon airfield commissioned by 25 December, Christmas Day, when the Dutch Government wanted to make a present of a planeload of medicines to the local government. That seemed a tall order, and I wanted to run out and get on with it, but then, in came Lieutenant General Niazi. He looked all washed out, and when the Corps Commander stood up for him, he protested saying that he (the Corps Commander) ought not to do that for a defeated soldier! He put out his hand and I introduced myself, taking his hand, and he gave a fairly long discourse on the need to rid Dacca of all mines and demolition charges, the Corps Commander only listening in, only now and then nodding with a respectful 'sir'. Niazi said he was averse to anyone dying or getting wounded now, as all was over, and added that he had already told Sharif to render all assistance to me. I was impressed though, as someone suggested, it might have been said to cover up past sins.

On 17 December Sharif had told me that I could keep his vehicle which had brought me to the airport, and as I came out of the Corps Commander's office, the Pakistani driver was there, with the vehicle parked outside, with star plates in full display. But now I had my own driver. So I took leave of him, but there was such a look of sorrow on his face that I could not help saying he need have no fears of any kind, that if there was any problem ever, he was free to contact me, or ask for me, now that he knew where I was located. I sincerely wanted to do something for him, and did not want him or his family to come to any harm.

Then we sped off to meet Sharif, where I left his driver, and thanked Sharif, and then we made a plan, and I left one of my Majors to get on with the clearing of all mines, and removing the demolition charges from the Mirpur bridge. Sharif was accommodating. He had received instructions from Niazi to extend full cooperation. He said that since I did not have enough troops for mine-clearing he would make available his troops, working under our supervision. It was a remarkably generous offer. As for the Tezgaon airfield, Sharif had his doubts, as he had tried to handle the task on 7 December, but found it was time-consuming. However, we rushed to the airport and in no time my officer had fished out the executive engineer, and we had got down to work. The executive engineer said he had the earth-moving machines but no operators. I had just

that, the operators I had brought along in a couple of vehicles. They took charge of the Pakistani earth-movers. We recruited hundreds of labourers, and soon the repair of the craters, which had been caused by the precision bombing of our Air Force, was under way. We worked days, and we worked nights. Fortunately there was no dearth of people looking for work. While we recruited hundreds, hundreds waited to be taken in, basically because we paid whoever we took for whatever work.

Of the Pakistani sappers who removed mines, one had his foot injured in an anti-personnel mine blast. We were unhappy, and I went to see him at the hospital. The blast had taken off the front half of the foot. But the man was fairly cheerful; he was young, around 23. He said it was God's will, and left it at that.

By 24 December the mines were almost out, the demolition charges, wherever they were, had been neutralised, the runway of the air field was being washed, and the final touches were being given to the process of putting tar macadam on the filled craters; this equipment gave us many an anxious moment as it kept going off every now and then, and the executive engineer was not well-stocked with spares. No doubt the equipment and machinery of the executive engineer was a big help - it was specially designed for the purpose - but the bulk of the work had been done by the enormous work force that we had put into action and which was wholly commanded by my officers and subordinates.

On 25 December morning I sat at the control tower of the airport. The Dutch Red Cross DC-6, with the promised load of medicines, arrived from Calcutta and was over the airport around 0900 hours. On the ground the very final touches were being given to the runway to get the plane to land. We had repaired around 6,000 feet of the runway and the pilot said it was alright. The silvery plane with its red tail looked pretty, sailing in the rich blue December sky. It landed after half an hour or so, and taxied over to the terminal building, and a shout of joy went up from the onlooking labour force. The pilot later told me that he had had no problem landing.

Back at the headquarters there were other problems. Any number of units of the Border Roads Organisation

wanted to come in; a couple of them had already arrived, and wanted me to find them accommodation and food. I had barely a man and a boy to look after the small headquarters that I had, and my staff was totally at a loss as to how to meet their requirement. A couple of days later an Engineer Colonel arrived in a staff car, and he told us that he had been detailed to coordinate the engineer operations around Dacca. So we just wound up and left the following morning, back on the road to Daudkandi, and thence to Maynamati. The Corps Headquarters, including the ad hoc one, had arrived there a couple of days earlier; an organisation under a Major General had moved to Dacca to conduct the civil affairs work.

When I arrived, still in the Toyota jeep of Brigadier Sharif, I was told that my luggage had been looted by our troops, mistaking the house allotted to me for that of a Pakistani officer. Though my staff had managed to retrieve most of the items, some attractive items like a fishing rod could not be traced.

An odd situation had come into being after the war. Now that the kill had been secured, any number of people pounced upon the loot. Most active were those who, before the start of the operations, had tucked themselves in holes where they were safe from physical dangers as well as any form of criticism. They hurled accusations at those who had been in the field, called them names, sometimes said things which were outright disgusting. The Government, whose covert policy appeared to be to keep some kind of in-fighting going in the services, joined in now and then, and supported the clamour for pulling down those who had notched success. For the war, though short, had thrown up an entirely different variety of leadership, and that had upset the calculations of many a man in position of authority. These touts had their own candidates being fielded for top appointments, and this short engagement had brought forth people who could stake claims to those places. The touts won, thanks to the people in and around the organisation, and the system. At the Army Headquarters people pinned medals on each other's chest, some claiming to have done good planning, others for sitting up late hours, and some for good typing work, while modest lists submitted by field formations containing names of people recommended for awards for genuine good work, rotted in obscure drawers, never to see the light of day.

During those days I had occasion to meet a number of Pakistani officers and men. Most of them were of the opinion that not more than 50,000 Bengalis could have become victims of what they called Pakistani retaliation to the killings perpetrated by them between 1 and 25 March 1971. During this period at Jhunjhunpur alone more than 3,000 non-Bengalis got killed or wounded; including some missing. Many were slaughtered in the jute mills. In Khulna and Chalna Bengalis had killed with impunity, not sparing even women and children. Even later, after India-trained Mukti Bahini guerillas had infiltrated into the country in large numbers, the West Pakistanis, particularly the Punjabis, had been besieged, and it was a problem even to get the essential supplies to them. Indeed, there were areas where guerillas' writ ran supreme, and government authority virtually non-existent. The Army had been quite tired out chasing the illusive guerillas, as they kept surfacing over widely dispersed points. The Army officers appeared to be unhappy with their police and EPCAF. They felt that they had queered the pitch right from the time they arrived, by unbridled looting and barbaric atrocities. When their attention was drawn to the fact that women were captured from the fighting bunkers of their Army, they blamed their paramilitary component for this, and were emphatic that their regular troops were highly disciplined. When they were told of the harsh treatment meted out to Indian soldiers who had been taken prisoners by them, they denied it. All kinds of accusations were being levelled against them, they said, now that they were not there to defend themselves.

Most officers and men seemed to agree that the surrender was in order, the outcome otherwise was a foregone conclusion. A sizable number seemed to agree that India had come in basically because she had never reconciled to the birth of Pakistan. A few believed that India would not rest till the western wing too was dismembered, while a few were of the opinion that Pakistani Muslims would avenge the humiliating defeat. A number of them were of the opinion that Pakistan had little chance of defeating India with conventional weapons, unless their army was organised and equipped like modern Western armies. There had been indications after the outbreak of open hostilities, that, in East Pakistan, the

armed forces were not prepared to fight the kind of losing battle they were fighting, when there was virtually no hope of retrieving a lost situation; there could have been mutinies. This perhaps was the one single factor which weighed heavily with the leadership when they took the decision to surrender. Besides, the decision enabled the Pakistanis to get back a large number of their combat-trained manpower with which they could refurbish their war machine so that, in a short span of time, they could once again face any threat to the security of the country from within or without.

India's military superiority was generally recognised, because it is a large country. Pakistan had made a pre-emptive strike in the west, but after securing a few successes they had gone on the defensive almost everywhere. India declared unilateral ceasefire in the west effective 2000 hours on 17 December, and upto that time in Punjab alone, where the major Pakistani military concentration was, Pakistan had lost around 1,000 square kilometres of territory. This had shaken their confidence in the thoroughness of their planning or the strength of their war machine. Their belief that Indians were a nation of pacifists who could be terrorised merely with loud fanatical expressions and demonstrations, had undergone a major change.

I have already covered earlier the aspect of India's capability to dismember even West Pakistan. The only sector where Indians could have attacked with any justification and hoped to retain the gains, was Jammu and Kashmir, for taking back the Pakistan-occupied territory. As it turned out, Pakistan subjected us to great pressure in Poonch and Chhamb, although we just about managed to restore the status quo, and that too not before 33 Infantry Brigade from 1 Corps had been moved there and the Corps' strike capability somewhat reduced. In Chhamb we had to be content with losing the chunk of territory west of the Manawarwali Tawi. After 16 December, 2 Corps was moved to Abohar so that it could take on operations in the Ganganagar-Anupgarh sector, but whether this could have, under the circumstances, dismembered West Pakistan, was doubtful. However, if Chinese neutrality could have been guaranteed, and more formations from the east could have been moved to the west, and considering our superiority in

air and sea, and the wherewithal required to sustain continued military action, in course of time it would have been possible to inflict a military defeat on Pakistan, given, of course, the national will and the leadership. But dismemberment is another question. Bangla Desh came into being because the people of East Pakistan just refused to live with the people of West Pakistan. There was no such polarisation in the western wing. There were fairly serious dissensions between the people of different provinces, like Punjabis and Baluchis or Pathans, but those were not serious enough. In any case, India just did not possess the will or the capability to conduct a long drawn-out war with Pakistan.

It has been brought out earlier that for the coming into being of Bangla Desh, unconditional surrender by the Pakistani military forces and their move out of the country were essential prerequisites. The surrender could be secured only with the capture of the inner triangle, and the major role in this was allotted to 4 Corps, it seems, almost at the last minute.

The enemy in this sector had been scattered in all directions, leaving the Dacca approach exposed, except that there was this Meghna river in between. The Corps was given MI-4 helicopters to get across the river. These included those required to cover the administrative needs. Delhi could not have been serious about taking the inner triangle, for no army planner could have hoped to achieve the capitulation of an enemy with just ten helicopters (unless they were chasing a band of dacoits), which was what ultimately became available for the task of ferrying troops. Dacca at that time had around 26,000 military and paramilitary personnel, out of which 4,500 belonged to infantry and another 3,000 to other arms, including signals (2,000), engineers, artillery and armour. If this force had been organised to take on the Indians, the heli-borne operation could have ended in a disaster. The higher authorities could not have been blind to this danger and, perhaps, for this reason Narsingdi was selected as the landing site; because it had the Lakhya river protecting the western flank against a spoiling attack from Dacca. The operation was mounted on the afternoon of 9 December and by 11 December four infantry battalions with assorted support arms, had crossed over by

air or on boats, and by 14 December had secured the west bank of Lakhya. While the alarm bells rang throughout the world, and the UN Assembly and the Security Council demanded immediate cessation of hostilities, and the US Seventh Fleet moved to the Bay of Bengal with declared hostile intentions, Indians found themselves without the wherewithal with which to speedily clinch the issue. There were pressures on Delhi, but Delhi seemed to be hardly doing much. At the field level 4 Corps Commander pursued the plan energetically and got across troops with a speed which certainly outmatched his resources. By 10 December, barely 18 hours after the start of the landing, the East Pakistan Government had sued for peace. Its military units east of the Meghna had lost the inclination, will and courage to move out of their redoubts and attack the besieging Indians who almost at all points, were inferior to them in numbers, except, of course, that they had mastery of the air.

On 10 December also, because of the threat posed by 4 Corps to Dacca, Pakistan decided to withdraw their troops defending the Jamalpur-Mymensingh sector. The Indians made the best of this opportunity, and never allowed time to the Pakistanis either to conduct an orderly withdrawal or put up organised resistance anywhere en route, so that when the withdrawing columns arrived at Dacca, they found the Indians entering almost alongside them. After the paradrop at Tangail the Indians were chasing a battalion-plus of badly battered Pakistanis with eight battalions duly supported by artillery and air. The Pakistanis were clearly in an unequal contest.

The Pakistan Eastern Command had finally come to the conclusion on 10 December that further fighting against Indians was futile, notwithstanding the views of Rawalpindi - generally even Rawalpindi was going along with this view. But the Indian intelligence about the goings on in Rawalpindi and Dacca was so poor that barely any determined move was made to bring the operations to a speedy finish, barring, of course, the oft-repeated radio messages of the Indian Army Chief asking the Pakistanis in East Pakistan to surrender. Both 2 and 33 Corps kept chasing the enemy in the areas of their responsibility, paying scant attention to the events in the inner triangle. The Navy stood around guarding the mouths of the

rivers, or taking part in a lame-duck operation in the Cox's Bazar area, but seemed totally unconcerned about any need to lend a helping hand in expediting the crossing over the Meghna. There seems to have been little justification for selecting Narsingdi as the site for the heli-drop, if the aim of the exercise was to capture Dacca, for en route, there was the major river obstacle of the Lakhya, and the not-so-major one of the Brahmaputra. The minimum that should have been done was the capture of the crossing places over the rivers. The correct place for the drop would have been the west bank of the Lakhya, considering that we had mastery of the skies, and the population in the inner triangle was intensely hostile to West Pakistan, and the area was totally dominated by the Mukti Bahini. We took just about three days to reach Daudkandi after 61 Brigade had gone in from north of Comilla on 6 December. But from Narsingdi to Lakhya, almost half that distance, it took five days, when the enemy had practically thrown in the towel and we knew that Dacca was undefended. The Indians moved copybook fashion, seeing too much enemy, deploying too often on flimsy considerations, inching forward with a caution that was not justified.

301 Mountain Brigade of 23 Mountain Division was cooling its heels at Chandpur - a part of it had even gone south - when, on 11 December, it was told to concentrate at Daudkandi by 16 December; the movement was to start from 12 December. Although the Brigade was to get across the Meghna, to Baidya Bazar, no one knew how that was going to happen, if at all. In between, because of the pressures, things started getting speeded up so that by 14-15 December two battalions of this Brigade were put across by helicopters, while the rest of the Brigade, moving by river, had got to the eastern bank of Lakhya by 14 December.

No worthwhile planning had been done to capture the inner triangle. It appears the task had been left to the Bengalis to accomplish after the Bangla Desh Government was installed in territory other than the inner triangle. Claims have been put in that the task of the northern thrust from Jamalpur-Mymensingh was to capture Dacca. As I have stated earlier, the claim is not substantiated by the ground deployment, or the thrust of events. It was too weak a force in infantry, armour, artillery or engineers to

achieve worthwhile results against resolute opposition. It was too vulnerable from the west, 2 Corps sector, north-west, 33 Corps sector, from Sylhet, and Bhairab Bazar. It was operating in total isolation, without any support from 2 or 33 Corps, though the two corps could, perhaps, claim to have fully engaged the enemy in their respective sectors and, thus, prevented him from disturbing this thrust. It was strengthened later in a cautious sort of way, but only after Dacca had committed the mistake of ordering the withdrawal of well-entrenched troops in Jamalpur-Mymensingh. Advance to Dacca was made possible after the collapse of Pakistan's will to fight, after they had called it a day and after a brigade from 4 Corps came across the Meghna, and not because any deliberate or elaborate planning for this had been done at Calcutta or Delhi. Nor was this intended to be the ultimate objective of this war. Crossing of the 4 Corps brigade was like a recce in force, designed more to encourage the Bengalis to take on the inner triangle, rather than to fight for the triangle by this brigade itself. The way 2 and 33 Corps were engaged in their respective sectors, it appears Delhi was committed only to take the areas upto the line of the rivers.

Bengali capability to ferret intelligence about the goings on in the East Pakistan Government was poor, even though there were any number of Bengalis, including the Governor, working in it. Indians, possibly because they were not thinking of Dacca, were extra cautious even after they had had indications of the Pakistani collapse on 10 December. They routinely followed their battle procedures, and went from one sure foot to the other in a combat where there was hardly any opposition; no engagement of worthwhile dimension took place within the triangle. Indians appeared to be out of their depth in their assessment of the enemy reaction in this area, and took little advantage of the softening up the Mukti Bahini had done for them. As it happened a man and a boy, riding a jeep with a white flag, sent by Nagra from the Mirpur bridge, secured the surrender. Otherwise, given to the strategists, they would have been outside Dacca for a long time yet, following the dictum that fighting in the cities is a costly affair, without realising that there was no one there to fight.

In the event, the aims and targets had not been worked out by the planners judiciously and rationally, even though they had almost nine months to do this. All that one sees in this situation is a very conventional battalion-company level plan, being implemented on the ground by divisional-corps level headquarters, and then the execution withering away into ad-hocism almost immediately after the preliminary stages. The plan bore little relationship to and took little advantage of the happenings in East Pakistan prior to the opening of hostilities in late November 1971. It was not a bold plan, nor was it based on a broad vision. It visualised jabs and pokes at too many places, frittering away too much energy, achieving only limited results on account of the extensive scattering of the available resources.

The intelligence at all levels was poor, and whenever intelligence did come in, the capability to utilise it to advantage was even poorer.

However, the war was won, and Bangla Desh came into being. Because of the intense hardship that the Bengalis had been put to, and because of their near-total alienation for this reason, it fell almost like a ripe plum. It happened, it appears, basically because of the atrocities that the West Pakistanis had committed, and the consequent suffering and sighs of the Bengali victims. Hundreds of thousands of Bengalis perished in this holocast, and the end came as if willed by some unseen power, as if this power had totally sapped the tyrants of their will to fight.

In the newly-formed Bangla Desh, the strains on account of the struggle for power between the army and the politicians were clearly visible. The members of the National Assembly, who had been enjoying Indian hospitality till then, had suddenly become powerful, but one thing they had failed to appreciate was that the power to them had literally flowed from the barrel of the gun, the gun wielded by officers and men who had grown up in a tradition which looked down upon civil values and political activity, and in their clamour for the spoils they forgot all this, and the gun. Besides, the armed forces believed that they were the authors of the movement for complete independence, and had fought for and secured it; the Awami League was only for autonomy!

Word went round that the Indian Army was there to stay, and a conspicuously forceful campaign got under way for its move out. In one instance, a cow was slaughtered in Dacca, in full view of an Indian battalion who strongly objected to this, and an ugly situation was averted only after the Indians backed out under strict instructions; the Bengalis said it was their country and they were free to do what they liked! A whispering campaign against senior military officers got going which, one had a nagging suspicion, was fanned even by the Indians descended from Delhi, or Calcutta, after the operations, to advise the Bengalis how to run their country. Soon Indians were being branded as thieves, drunkards, even rapists, the kind of charges which only a few weeks earlier used to be heaped on the West Pakistanis. Bengalis said Indians were taking to India the militaryware that they had captured from the Pakistanis; Bengalis claimed it was their property. When India sent goods to the Bengali markets, with the intention of making available readily the consumer items to people who had been denied the benefits of possessing them for a long time, the Bengalis in towns disdainfully rejected them as items of inferior quality; they were accustomed to goods from Western countries or Japan, and preferred to wait for them. Even Indians, if they could, freely purchased their imported goods under their amused eyes.

All kinds of rumours were afloat. On the eve of the surrender a number of doctors, professors, lawyers had been murdered in cold blood; some put the number as around 150. It was said to be the handiwork of ultra-rightist organisations like Al-Badr and Al-Shams, having political affiliations with Jamaat-e-Islami, a party patronised by the West Pakistanis. These organisations, it appears, had sent cyclostyled letters to a number of Bengali professionals and intellectuals, threatening them that, because of the support they had lent to the Bangla movement, they would be killed. They called the victims "boot-licking dogs and agents of Indiraism who, on different pretexts, are making vain attempts to destroy the largest Muslim state of the world, Pakistan."

It was said that some politicians in India were suggesting to the Bengali leaders the re-merging of the two Bengals. There was talk that an Indo-Bangla

confederation was being considered actively by the top politicians in the two countries. There was a ring of this even in the international circles, and, so it was said, the agencies opposed to reunification and averse to the growth of Indian influence in South and South-East Asia, sprang into action and, perhaps, one direct result of this was the sudden and unexpected release of Mujib on 8 January 1972 from the Mainwali jail in Pakistan. Bhutto, apparently, had been prevailed upon to let him go before it was too late and his country slumped into irretrievable anarchy, or joined a confederation with India. No doubt there were other equally pressing reasons for his release, one among them being the surging world opinion!

Mujib arrived in Delhi on 10 January 1972, via London, where he must have been briefed about the goings on in his country; he had earlier refused a Red Cross plane hired by India, for taking him from West Pakistan to Dacca. A large number of people turned up at the Parade Ground, Delhi Cantonment, to hear him speak; he had insisted that he would speak only in Bengali. He was fawned over, fussed over, and received such attention from the Indian leaders as would suggest that he was the liberator of India. Perhaps Indians were getting a bit serious about the confederation idea, otherwise the noise and fuss around him hardly made sense. One of the first jobs Mujib applied himself to on arrival at Dacca, was to see to the early pull-out of the Indian Army. The Bengali army officers, and rank and file, were worried about their future, for though Colonel Osmani had taken over as their C-in-C and had promoted himself to the rank of a four-star general, he was basically a political man. Coming from an affluent and influential family of Sylhet, son of an ICS officer of united India, educated at Cotton School and a graduate of Aligarh Muslim Uniersity, having joined the Indian Army in 1939 and retired from the Pakistan Army in 1967, he had joined the Awami League in July 1970, during the days of its hectic political activity, and had been elected a Member, National Assembly in the December 1970 elections, from Sylhet constituency. The army hard core did not consider him to be the man who would look after their interests.

The politicians, having assumed power, wanted the Bahinis to lay down arms and return to civil life. The

Bahinis were staking their claims, and here again the army came to the rescue of the civilians, and eventually managed to get them disarmed. Mujib believed that the Bahinis, including Qadir Bahini (16,000 strong, who laid down their arms before the Shiekh on 23 January) led by 'Tiger' Qadir Siddiqui, relented in deference to his wishes. He made a lot of school-teacher talk, interspersed with emotional histrionics, and ultimately pushed them off-stage with a lot of endearing sounds. Perhaps, he believed, he would manage the army too in the same manner, for he believed that he was riding the crest of popularity and would be able to put the soldiers back in the barracks. On 10 January, having taken off from Delhi after a three-hour break, he arrived at the Tej Gaon airport at 1410 hours (local time), and the same evening he addressed a public meeting at the Race Course Maidan which was attended by a million people. But the soldiers conspiring against him were hard-core veterans who were not likely to be deterred by mammoth crowds, and though young in years, they nursed ambitions which were beyond the comprehension of Mujib. He was the Prime Minister, though on 10 April 1971, the Bangla Desh Government-in-exile had called him the President; he had changed that immediately on his arrival by an ordinance issued on 11 January 1972. He took personal affront if he was not addressed as Bangapita or Bangabandhu by anyone inside or outside the government. The army was not prepared to concede that title to him, for he had worked only for autonomy, and not independence.

The Indian Army engineers were told to restore the damages caused by the war, as early as possible. East Bengal had a competent engineering service of their own, and all that was required was to deploy this service on the basis of predetermined priorities, and help them with our equipment and manpower, so that normalcy was restored at the earliest. Where Indian Army engineers came in a big way was the restoration of the road communications by constructing equipment (primarily Bailey) bridges, and rail communications; our railway engineers played a major role in this by repairing the bridges and tracks. Our Inland Water Transport engineers helped in restoring ferry services and repairing jetties. All mines were cleared and demolition charges neutralised; in this task even Pakistan sappers lent a cooperative hand. We repaired power transmission lines and greatly contributed to the

restoration of water supply and sewage systems in Dacca and other towns. We made a major contribution in the repair of airfields all over East Bengal. We had been given upto the end of March 1972 to complete the allotted tasks, but we were through with them by the end of February; whatever was left was well within the capabilities of Bangla Desh engineers. On 12 March 1972 a farewell parade was organised at Dacca, where Mujib took the salute. And then we were out. Almost all the Pakistani prisoners of war had moved out of Bangla Desh by then, and there was really no justification for the Indian Army to be there.

Around the first week of February, I was at Maynamati, along with my staff, supervising the rehabilitation operations. I still had the Toyota jeep of the Pakistani chief engineer, and I had to run around a lot to coordinate the activities of the various engineering agencies, including Bangla engineers. One morning Corps Headquarters told me that Brigadier Zia (later Major General, and still later President of Bangla Desh), who was then appointed as Z Force Commander for Comilla and Noakhali - he was a Major when he had announced on radio from Chittagong the formation of independent Bangla Desh nine months earlier, on 27 March 1971 - was objecting to my using the Pakistani vehicle. I replied I was using it only to coordinate the works being executed for the Bengalis, my own vehicle was under repairs, that the Bengalis might rest assured that the vehicle would stay behind when I left the country; I had no doubt I would leave in my own vehicle! A couple of days later staff told me that Zia had again objected to the use of the vehicle, and sent me a ramshackle Jonga, asking me to return the Pakistani vehicle and use the other one instead till my own vehicle arrived from the workshop after repairs. The pitch between us and the Bengalis was getting queered by the day; Zia and his EBR officers had a major role in this. They even went to the extent of accusing us of having shown more concern for the Punjabis of Pakistan than for them. They said we allowed them to keep their weapons even after they had surrendered. They said that the West Pakistani army in East Bengal was in fact an army of occupation, and its officers and soldiers were not entitled to the benefits of the Geneva Convention, as the crimes committed by them were against helpless civilians, of their own country; the Geneva Convention came into the picture only when soldiers

fight soldiers of another country, in regular warfare. Now that the Pakistanis had been disarmed, the Bengalis thirsted for their blood and wanted the Indians to let them have a go!

The anger of the Bengalis was all the more intense as numerous mass graves of people slaughtered by the West Pakistanis, with whom the Biharis had collaborated, were unearthed during the post-surrender period. Once I could not help intervening when, on my way to Chittagong, I came across a gathering of people seated in an organised manner, watching four young men beat to pulp a bearded, middle-aged man; the crowd watched as if it was a theatrical show. They said that the man was a notorious informer and had been the cause of hundreds of deaths of the Bengalis. One man jumped into my vehicle and offered to show me where mass executions had taken place. Others around insisted that I should see what he intended to show. So we went along. There were human bones lying around in a couple of fields, but not as many as he had said there were. He said that over the period of nine months a lot of them had been consumed by jackals and such other animals. A lot of stories about genocide and atrocities by Punjabis in collaboration with Biharis were in circulation; some gave graphic and provocative descriptions of heinous crimes. But sometimes one heard the same kind of story at more than one place, even when the places had scores of kilometres between them. I later learnt that they had shot the Bihari. I had tried to rescue him, but during my short absence they had done away with him.

At Sitakund too there were mass graves, and the guide told us that the place was defiled - it has a temple in the grottos of the rock-hill overlooking the Chittagong road - and the kund, a small water tank, had been filled with human skulls. Close to Chittagong, my engineer officer working on the road told me that they had just rescued a Bihari woman from the hands of a Mukti militant. And so there were incidents galore. A major upheaval had rocked the country. At every step there was evidence of mutually hostile forces at play. To bring the country to a settled state, with the authority of law restored, was going to be a difficult task. The country was paying for its decisions of 1947 and 1970.

War had put forth new centres of power, and to understand these centres and channalise the new energies along constructive lines, required a careful comprehension of the new forces. Deliberate, well-thought-out plans were necessary in this situation. As it happened all the three countries involved paid scant attention to this, and paid the price for it. Everywhere anarchy in varying degree, reared up, and opportunists had a heyday, throwing honesty, sincerity and justice to the winds. The result was that instead of free, viable democracies there came into being autocratic governments run by groups for their own benefit rather than for the benefit of the people whom they ruled.

The head clerk gave me a bundle of letters written in Urdu, by the Pakistani soldiers to their homes in West Pakistan. These had come from the forward posts and localities, and were, apparently, on their way out of East Bengal. The bundle had been found in an obscure corner during the cleaning process prior to the occupation of the place for my office at Maynamati; obviously, the Pakistanis had forgotten to destroy them before leaving the place. Most of the letters were enquiries, often quite anxious ones, about the well-being of friends and relatives. Some were grouses against the authorities for moving in a manner detrimental to their property or monetary interests, at a time when they were engaged in a fight for the very survival of Pakistan. Such letters had curses for the authorities or those who were instigating them. Is this the way the country takes care of our interests, one had asked. Some letters had been written to fiancees or young wives or girl friends, in teasing, scintillating language. All the soldiers who had written them were either dead or wounded or prisoners of war! Since our security had no need for them I destroyed those letters.

On 12 March 1972 Indians presented the parade to Mujib in a farewell gesture, and that was about all. In this war we lost 1,500 all ranks killed and there were 4,200 wounded; and if we take into account the casualties on the western front, which got activated on account of the problems of East Bengal, our dead would total to over 3,000 and the wounded to 8,000. And much more than this went in before the nation of Bangla Desh came into being. Yet the

Bengalis did not consider it worthwhile even to erect a small memorial for the people who made sacrifices for them. Nor, for that matter, did the Indian Government consider it worth their while! The Pakistanis had around 3,000 killed and 4,500 wounded in the eastern sector, and about 4,000 killed and 8,000 wounded in the western sector. Overall combined loss on both sides was around 10,000 dead and 20,000 wounded.

Thus came to the end another stage of the journey, the adventure course the Bengalis had adopted for themselves in 1947, on the basis of thin arguments, false and contrived sentiments, a religious fervour fomented to a frenzy by self-seeking mullas and maulvis. And the end came after a blood-curdling upheaval, in which millions upon millions got involved in a macabre drama of horrible blood-letting and wanton death and destruction, a heavy price paid by people whose forebears only one generation earlier, had forced an unnatural partition on this subcontinent. Societies, groups, states, nations have to be careful and deliberate when taking far-reaching decisions, for their import will sit heavy upon their offspring.

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